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**THE
SURPRISES OF LIFE**

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THE STRONGEST
LE GRAND PAN
AU FIL DES JOURS
ETC.

THE SURPRISES OF LIFE

BY
GEORGES CLEMENCEAU

TRANSLATED BY
GRACE HALL



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DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1920

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MOKOUBAMBA'S FETISH

THE SURPRISES OF LIFE

I

MOKOUBAMBA'S FETISH

IT MAY be that you knew Mokoubamba who became famous in Passy for his labours as a reseater of rush-bottomed chairs, weaver of mats, of baskets and hampers, mender of all things breakable, teller of tales, entertainer of the passerby, lover of all haunts where poor mortality resorts to eat and drink. He was an old Negro from the coast of Guinea, very black as to skin, wholly white as to hair, with great velvety black eyes and the jaws of a crocodile whence issued childlike laughter. He used to honour me with his visits on his way home at evening when he had not sold quite all his wares. With abundance of words and gestures, he would explain to me how fortunate I was to need precisely the article of which by an unforeseen and kindly chance he was the owner. And as he saw that I delighted in his talk, he gave free rein to that spirited eloquence which never failed to bring him more or less remuneration.

Our latest "reformers" having put intoxication by the juice of the grape within reach of all, Mokoubamba died on the fourteenth of last July, from having too copiously celebrated the taking of the Bastille. No more will Passy see Mokoubamba, with his white *burnous*, his scarlet *chechia*, his green boots, and his drum-major's staff. A genuine loss to the truly Parisian picturesqueness of this quarter. As for me, how should I not miss the rare companion who had seen so many lands, consorted with so many sages, and collected so many strange teachings?

"Mokoubamba knows the whole earth," he was wont to say, candidly adding: "Mokoubamba knows everything that man can know."

And the generosity of this primitive nature will be seen in the fact of his not keeping his hoard of knowledge to himself, but lavishing it upon all comers. He was equally willing to announce what the weather would be on the morrow and what it had been on the day before. By means of cabalistic signs on a very grimy bit of parchment he foretold any man's destiny: a choice destiny, indeed, of whose felicities he was never known to be niggardly.

The poor were informed that a rich inheritance awaited them, the rich saw their fortunes increased by unlooked-for events, love knocked at the door of the young, children came into the world who were to be the pride of their families, the old, beloved for

their own sakes, saw their lives stretch out indefinitely: Mokoubamba kept a Paradise shop.

One day I made bold to call him to account for this, claiming that life held in store for us disappointments, here and there, for the purpose of giving an edge to our pleasures, and that there must from time to time be a discrepancy between the sovereign bliss of which he so freely held out the hope and the sum of realized joys.

"Life," replied the wise Mokoubamba, "is a procession of delights. As soon as one has disappeared, another has started upon its way. It may be a more or less long time in arriving, but no one will begrudge waiting for it, and the waiting is often the best a man gets out of it."

For a chairmender this saying seemed to me fairly profound.

"Who taught you this?" I asked.

"A fakir from Benares from whom the heavens withheld no secrets."

"You have been in India?"

"I have been everywhere."

"Mokoubamba, my friend, yours is no ordinary life. Will you not tell me something of it? The past interests me more than the future."

"If you will order them to give me coffee and cigarettes, and if I may drink and smoke as long as I talk, you shall have my entire history."

I nodded in assent, and Mokoubamba, taking pos-

session of my verandah, squatted upon one of his own mats, inhaled the perfume of Arabia, exhaled three puffs of curly blue smoke, and seemed to lose himself in the search for a starting point.

"What was your first occupation?" I asked by way of helping him on.

"The easiest of all," said he, with a shamefaced air. "I began by being a minister."

"Minister!" I cried in high surprise. "Minister to whom? Minister of what?"

"Minister to the great King Matori. Down there—down there—beyond the Niger."

"Truly! My compliments to His Excellency! And you say the profession seemed an easy one to you? Your colleagues up here would scarcely agree with you."

"I speak of what I have seen. In my country those who are the masters are always in the right. Tell me if you know of a place on earth where it is any different? I did not know how to do anything. I could not even have braided a mat in those days. Well, then, all that I said was admirable, and as soon as I had given an order it was considered the best in the world. I was myself a Fetish, my mother having given me birth on a day of rain after a long drought which had reduced our villages to famine."

"And what were your functions?"

"The same as elsewhere. I was purveyor of provisions to the royal household and I reserved a

just share for myself. Matori loved me very much. But I had enemies. They persuaded him that my Fetish was stronger than his, and as he feared my power, he sold me to an English trader who needed carriers for his ivory. It was a long journey to the coast. If a man fell he was gently dispatched on the spot, so that he might not be eaten alive by the beasts, and his load was distributed among the rest of us. Without my Fetish I should have been left behind. I may add that being beaten with a stick helped to keep up my courage."

"And what is your Fetish?"

"At that time I did not know, but I felt it without knowing. In time we arrived among the English. I was not a slave. Oh, no! but I had been 'engaged,' and in order that I might better fill my 'engagement' they fastened me, with many others, to the wall of a courtyard, by an iron chain."

"Poor Mokoubamba!"

"I was not unhappy, for they fed me very well. They wished to have us in good condition so as to get rid of us. It was there that I learned the art of weaving reeds and rattan, and carving curious designs upon wood. My neighbour, the man chained beside me, was a great sorcerer in his own land. He could carve bamboo, he could cook; he was skilled in hammering red-hot iron, in stitching leather, in dancing; he could call up spirits. They took very good care of him. They did not sell him, of course,

since there existed no slavery, but they bartered him for two dozen bottles of French brandy. There was a price for you! Matori had handed me over for a single calabash of rum and a copper trumpet."

"Poor Mokoubamba!"

"Yes, you are right! It was a paltry price. I was humiliated by it for a long time. But as my new master used to say, I must learn to overcome the demon of pride."

"Your new master used to say that?"

"It was like this. I was quietly sitting at my chain one day, making a large basket, when a man dressed in black, with an edge of white around his neck, came near me and said: 'My brother, what have you done with your soul?' I had learned a few words of English on the journey. However, I asked my visitor to repeat his question. He repeated it again and again, and I finally understood that he was talking about my Fetish, and that he wished to know what I had done with it. I answered that it was a sacred thing, and that I had it with me, but that I would willingly employ it in his service if he would acquire me for a sum of money. My answer had the good fortune to please him, it seems, for on that very evening the excellent Reverend Ebenezer Jones installed me in his parsonage. He taught me about his great Fetish, who did not much differ from Matori's. Is not a Fetish always something that we do not know and that works us either

good or evil? We ask it for good, and it does not always grant it. But as I was just saying, we go on expecting it, and that keeps us in patience.

"Ebenezer Jones told me beautiful tales full of marvels, and he always ended with the question: 'Dost thou believe?'"

"How should I not have believed him? So good a man, who daily let me have soup with meat in it. I was baptized by him with a fine ceremony. Before long he was so pleased with me that he made me his sexton. I was the edification of the faithful, everyone brought me gifts, and I was able, unknown to the Right Reverend, to treat myself to a superior brand of *tafia*.

"Ebenezer Jones travelled about the country preaching his Fetish, and I accompanied him. I had ended by knowing his discourses by heart, and often at gatherings I recited portions of them after he had finished speaking. People understood me better than they did him, which was not to be wondered at. My 'spiritual guide' owed to me most of the success that made him famous in his own country. This lasted for nearly ten years.

"One day, Ebenezer having been called back to London proposed that I should follow him. I did it joyfully, and I must say that the six weeks I spent in that capital were one long-drawn-out feast. I was exhibited at the Missionary Society as a model among converts. At dessert I would rise and speak of my

complete happiness, which was but natural after so good a meal. People wept with emotion, and so did I myself. In that country the religious fervour of elderly gentlewomen is extraordinary. Between puddings and mince pies, it was one stream of gifts of food. Never have I eaten so well or drunk so much.

“There, however, I was surprised to find that the English no more than the Negroes are all of one mind with regard to their Fetishes, which I ought to have expected. In Africa, at a six days’ journey from our church, there was a Catholic Mission. I was careful never to go near it, since Ebenezer had warned me that they worked evil spells there upon the poor Negroes who let themselves be deceived.

“But one afternoon in London, I was accosted by a big devil of an Irish priest who had heard of my religious zeal. He was greatly perturbed by the glory which the Missionary Society owed to me. He had determined to snatch me away from Ebenezer Jones. I let him take me home with him, where I found a table abundantly spread. Meat, pies, and preserves, and liqueurs, oh, such liqueurs! I was deeply shaken, and could not disguise the fact from my new friend, Father Joseph O’Meara. He increased his efforts, and so successfully explained to me the superiority of his Fetishes over Ebenezer’s that I was obliged to agree he was right. No sooner had I uttered the word than he baptized me on the spot, gave me a good bed to sleep in, and on the

morrow celebrated my reconversion with a ceremony even finer than the former one. There were Fetishes everywhere surrounded by lights. Joseph O'Meara wept for joy and so did I. That evening there was a magnificent banquet, . . . just like the others. They had taught me a speech, but as the generous potations had slightly clouded my memory, I was able to utter but one sentence: 'Mokoubamba is very happy, very happy.'

"And that was no lie.

"The trouble was now that Ebenezer Jones, ashamed of having allowed Mokoubamba to be stolen from him, wished to get me back. But Joseph O'Meara was not the man to let any such trick be played upon him. I was treated like a prince, and kept well in sight for fifteen glorious days. Then it was explained to me that I must go to another country so as to escape from the machinations of the 'Evil One,' which was the name of Ebenezer's bad Fetish. I was consequently hurried off to a mission in Bombay where the religion was very different. Here were priests who fasted all day long. A moiety of rice, much dust, and as much warm water as I cared to consume. This did not suit me in the least. I wandered about the streets looking for some Fetish willing to take an interest in me. There are all manner of people out there. I questioned concerning their Fetishes a Parsee, a fire-worshipper who had nothing to cook in his dish, and a Chinaman

who considering my appetite told me that I should be born again in the form of a shark. None of them showed any care to convert me. A Mahomedan alone seemed disposed to win me over to his Fetish, but he wished first to take from me a portion of something which I at that time considered very desirable. That ended it.

“I travelled, weaving baskets and mats, even as I do to-day. I lived very poorly. Everyone in that country cares above all things for his own Fetish, and will not change it. There is no work there for Ebenezer Jones or Joseph O’Meara. And yet their Fetishes leave the people in great misery. They let them starve by the hundred thousand, yet no one has the slightest idea of turning to those Fetishes through whom other peoples live in abundance.

“I laid this question before a fakir of Benares who was said to possess supreme wisdom. His Fetish was a wooden bowl behind which he squatted at the roadside by way of adoration. Looking at the thing casually, you would have seen in it nothing extraordinary. And yet that bowl had the property of attracting money because of the belief established by the fakir that it brought good luck to the giver. Indeed, I have found the same thing true here in your country. But the mendicant fakir class of India is here divided in two classes: the beggar by trade, to whom you give nothing because he is not ‘respectable,’ and the professional fakir to whom

you give everything because your success may depend on his favour.

“The man of Benares knew this and much besides. He became my friend because of the very simplicity of my questions. At evening he would bestow on me the alms of a bowl of rice. Often he let me spread my litter in his reed hut. At night under the stars he taught me concerning the creation, and imparted to me his knowledge of all things. It was he who expounded to me the great mystery of Fetishes, since which I have lived without care for the morrow. Later, a Parsee, a great grain merchant, took me to your Algiers, and thence brought me here, where I have remained. But all that I have seen of the world has but confirmed my belief in the profound wisdom of the illustrious fakir of Benares.”

“Good. But what did he tell you about Fetishes?”

“You see . . . I have no more coffee. . . .”

“There you are, and how about this little glass of brandy?”

“With pleasure. And anyway it can be summed up in one word. The fakir told me that the universe is but one huge agglomeration of Fetishes. There are as many as there are creatures alive. Some are strong and some are weak. It is a great battle as to which shall come out on top. The wicked are those who work evil on others to get the upper hand. The

good are those who use gentleness, persuasion, art. One had better be on the side of the good unless one is stronger than they."

"I see. But was the fakir speaking of Fetishes or of men?"

"Ha-ha! You want to know all of it! Another little glass and you shall have your answer. Excellent! I can refuse you nothing. Well, then, the fakir affirmed that Fetish and man are one and the same thing, for every man makes his Fetish according to the strength of his interest in himself, and the will power he expends in satisfying it. That is why I am not deceiving when I foretell a happy fortune for people. It but strengthens their Fetish, their chance of happiness is increased, they enjoy it in anticipation."

"Then, Mokoubamba, under varying forms and shifting denominations, you maintain that the only Fetish to whom you have remained unalterably faithful, and which has rewarded your fidelity by pulling you through everything in the world——"

"Is Mokoubamba himself. There is the great secret. Meditate upon it, like the fakir——"

'I shall meditate upon it, have no fear. But do you suppose this great secret is known in Benares alone?"

"I have often asked myself that question. Judging by actions, everyone seems perfectly aware of what he is about. But I have never known any one

except the fakir of Benares to state things as they are."

Thus spake Mokoubamba, reseater of rush-bottomed chairs in Passy, mender of all things breakable, entertainer of the passerby, teller of fanciful tales.

A DESCENDANT OF TIMON

II

A DESCENDANT OF TIMON

TIMON of Athens hated all men because he had once too greatly loved them. To whom shall the fault be ascribed, to mankind, or to Timon of Athens? The long-standing open question does not yet appear to have been answered. The human race continues to lay the blame on its detractors, and the descendants of Timon, who was above all a disappointed lover of his kind, have not ceased to find good reasons for their censure.

The special descendant of Timon who trotted me on his knee when I was a child was an old navy doctor retired from service after a severe wound received at Navarino. If I close my eyes, the better to call up my memories, there arises before me a long, gaunt silhouette surmounted by a bald head, the entire figure running to length, which is, they say, the mark of an immoderate idealism. I remember his small, mocking green eyes, sunk behind the brush of his formidable eyebrows. The long, white side-whiskers, the carefully shaven lips that would stretch to his ears in a grin like Voltaire's, accompanied by a dry chuckle, have remained alive in my memory,

as have also his wide, incoördinate gestures, his dry, harsh voice, and his biting, wrathful utterances.

I should find it impossible at this distance to trace the life history of Doctor Jean du Pouët, known over the entire Plain, from Sainte Hermine to Fontenay-le-Comte, under the familiar yet respectful title of "The Doctor." All I can say is that the Doctor, hailing originally from L'Aiguillon, a little port of the Vendée at the mouth of the Lay, had sailed every sea, landed on every island, visited every coast of every continent, and made his studies of all nations on earth from life, which enabled him to criticise his neighbours at every turn by comparing them, disastrously for them, with heaven knows what abominable savages, in which comparison the latter were always found far superior, with regard to the point under discussion, to the men of the Vendée, from the Plain, the Woodland, and the Marsh, all put together.

It was in the very heart of the Plain, in the village of Ecoulandres, that the "Doctor" had come to settle, brought there by an inheritance from a cousin, who had left him lord and master of an old middle-class dwelling with large tile-paved rooms in which hung panoplies of tomahawks, javelins, bucklers, boomerangs, in warlike wreaths around monstrous idols, whose barbaric names, impressively enumerated by the traveller, aroused a holy terror in the soul of the peaceable tillers of the soil.

A little wood of elms, a great curiosity in a region where not a tree is to be seen, surrounded the domain. It was a thin copse, the layer of soil making but a shallow covering to the underlying limestone. This did not prevent our stern censor from taking a certain pride in his "grove," without its like to the furthestmost boundary of the horizon. I must even confess that the doctor, like any other true son of the Vendée, had a very well-developed sense of landed proprietorship. Money ran through his fingers, and no outstretched palm ever sought his help in vain. But the possessive pronoun rose readily to his lips when talk turned upon the land. "My dung," "my stones," "my nettles," he was wont to say. He adored his Plain—"Green in springtime, in summer gold," where fleecy crops rippled under the great blue canopy, —pierced along the horizon by steeples suggestive of distant shipping. Flights of plovers in January and ducks in September engaged the doctor's attention. He watched for them from a murderous shooting shelter, and invented incredible ruses to allure them nearer. The rest of his time was spent scouring the countryside in a jolting rural trap, hastening to the bedside of the sick, who sent for him on any and all occasions, but did not greatly value his visits, as he never required payment, or administered to his patients that accompanying dose of legitimate charlatanism which forms the chief factor in so many cures.

For the doctor was above all things outspoken. I am unaware whether some great disappointment had driven him to misanthropy, or whether he had merely given way to the natural bent of his character. Whatever may have been his soul's history, it is certain that he at every opportunity exercised his fine capacity for indignation against mankind in general, and with particular delight against the specimens of it who happened to be present. Never any coarse rudeness, however, and absolutely never any active ill will. He was not to be taken at his word, his pleasure consisting merely in satanic thoughts, the cruel expression of which sufficed for the satisfaction of his ferocity.

You should have heard him on the subject of love, of friendship, of gratitude. It was his joy to demonstrate that every form of courtesy concealed a lie, by which he was no more deceived than was the person favouring him with it. It was no pleasure trip, coming to thank him for having saved a sick man's life. The patient and his friends heard startling things concerning the self-interest at bottom of their thoughts.

"Are you so glad, then, not to get your inheritance?" he would say to a son who came to tell him of his old father's complete return to health.

And he would cite living parallels, drawn from the life of neighbouring villages, calling the characters by name, to demonstrate what a foundation of selfish-

ness was covered by the veneer of affection people are so fond of exhibiting. The peasant would listen silently, wearing a foolish grin, pretending to be stupid in order to escape the necessity of answering, and admitting in the depth of his inmost heart that the doctor read him like an open book, and that one could have no secrets from that devil of a man.

His talk upon marriage, the family, religion, property, the judiciary, the administration itself, was directed by the blackest psychology. But his chief victim was the *curé* of Ecoulardres, an old friend who did not take abuse without virulent retaliation, which led to curious fencing bouts between the two.

The truth is that the two men had a great liking for each other. Both of them were remnants of the France of the eighteenth century, both suffering from the same stab of disillusion which the Revolution and the Empire had driven into their fondest dreams. The doctor found vent in wrath, the Abbé in resignation. Fundamentally alike in their wounded ideality, they sought each other out in the obstinate hope of agreeing, yet met only to offend, and to spend their strength in painful and useless strife, parting with bruised hearts and great oaths never to meet again, only to rush together on the following day.

The Abbé Jaud, like his inseparable enemy, was of more than ordinary height, and without the cassock clinging to his lean sides might at fifty paces have

been taken for him. The doctor's excuse for frequenting the Abbé was that he could talk to him without stooping. When the two tall silhouettes were outlined against the horizon at the edge of the plain they might have been taken for one and the same man. They were, in truth, one man in two persons.

In their last years death naturally formed the inexhaustible topic of their conversation. The doctor had, he used to say, determined to die before the Abbé, in order to force him to perform an act of supreme hypocrisy by obliging him to bury with every formality the man who, having proclaimed himself an atheist all his days, had refused with his latest breath to put himself in order with the Church.

"One talks like that," said the Abbé. "When on the verge of the great step, one changes one's mind."

"Mine will not change."

"Then, my dear Doctor, I shall be under the painful necessity of letting you go unaccompanied to the grave."

"Not so. You will accompany me. You will mutter your Pater Nosters, let me assure you. You will sprinkle my coffin with holy water. You will sing psalms, clad in your finest stole. You will say a mass with all the fallals, and you will not leave me until you have provided me with a proper passport in due form."

"Cease blaspheming, or I must refuse to listen."

“A fine way to dispose of a difficulty! Do you know where I wish to be buried by your good agency, Abbé? In the unconsecrated part of the graveyard. Once upon a time the earth as well as the skies belonged to you. You laid claims to this planet as your property, and no one had the right to rot under ground save by your leave. Six feet of sod had to be wrested from you by main force to bury Molière! To-day, at last, we have taken back control over our earth. We have conquered the right to a peaceful return to nothingness. And now, to foster the illusion of getting even, and to shut yourselves to the very end in your secular spirit, you have devised nothing better than to create an unhallowed portion in the field of eternal rest. The other day, when I went there to select a spot to my liking, did not a fool of a peasant say to me: ‘You mustn’t be buried there, Doctor, that corner is reserved for those condemned to death.’ To be ‘condemned to death’ seemed to that idiot the utmost of horror. He does not realize that he—that they—that you—that we are all in the same case, my poor Abbé. Well, I chose my spot. I had a great stake driven there, so that there should be no mistake. Go and have a look at it, Abbé, for it is there that you will with pomp and ceremony, according to your rites, deposit me in unhallowed ground.”

“That will never be, my dear Doctor.”

“That will surely be, my dear Abbé.”

A few months later, the doctor, after lying in wait for plovers on the Plain (it was Christmas Eve, and he was then more than eighty years old), returned home shivering with fever. A pleurisy set in on the following day, and soon death was rapidly nearing.

The Abbé was by his bedside, as will have been surmised. When he saw that there was no hope of recovery:

“Come, my dear friend,” he began, having sent away the bystanders, “do you not think it fitting, in this hour, to speak seriously of serious things?”

“Hush,” said the dying man, placing a thin, feverish finger on the priest’s lips. “We have said all there was to be said, and there is nothing more to say. Take the key under my pillow—open that drawer—and give me my will—the drawer on the left—hand me also a pen—I wish to add a line.”

The Abbé did as he was requested. The trembling hand wrote a few words, then the head fell back on the pillow. The old man was dying. An hour later Doctor Jean du Pouët had breathed his last.

The will when opened ran thus:

“I die in absolute unbelief, refusing to perform any act of faith. I bequeathe my fortune, which amounts approximately to 100,000 francs, to the church of Ecoulandres, for the purchase, under the direction of M. the Abbé Jaud, of ornaments of the cult, as sumptuous as the sum permits. This in the hope that the sight of such wealth in contrast with

their own poverty will awaken appropriate sentiment in the souls of my fellow citizens. I desire to be buried in the unconsecrated part of the cemetery, in the spot where six months ago I caused a stake to be driven. If the Church should refuse me her prayers, the disposition above described will be held null and void. In that case I name as my sole legatee Toussaint Giraudeau, apothecary of Sainte Hermine, and President of the Masonic Lodge named 'Fraternity.' I desire him to distribute the inheritance as he shall think best among those Masonic activities most especially directed against superstition and mummery."

Under the signature were added these words:

"I shall be dead within the hour. Nothing to change," and the name, in a large, shaky handwriting, which, by the emphasis of the downward stroke told, however, of an inflexible will.

The Abbé Jaud's first impulse was one of haughty refusal, but his second was to go and consult his bishop, who made clear to him that highest duty lay in presenting every obstacle to Free Masonry. He was obliged to obey. The doctor in his grave had the last word, his face twisted with sardonic laughter under the holy water sprinkled by the discomfited Abbé.

The infants born before their time who filled in the cemetery of Ecoulاندres, "the corner reserved for those condemned to death," gained this much by the

event, that the earth they lay in was blessed. In that respect, at least, one of the doctor's predictions was unfulfilled.

But the Abbé's real revenge, although he was perhaps unaware of it, was that the sight of the magnificent golden chalices and monstrances ornamented with precious stones, far from arousing rebellion in the hearts of the poor, as the doctor had intended, only increased the fervour of the faithful, and provoked the piety of the indifferent by wonder at the splendour in which the power of the Invisible revealed itself. Victory and defeat on both sides. Blows struck in the darkness of the Unknown. And so passes the life of man.

MALUS VICINUS

III

MALUS VICINUS

SAINT-JUIRS is the name of a village in the canton of Sainte Hermine. Lying on the slope of a hill, it overlooks a fresh, grassy valley planted with poplars and watered by a brook which has no recorded name. A very modest Romanesque church laboriously hoists skyward a heavy stone belfry amid a clump of elm and nut trees. The ruins of an old castle degenerated from the dignity of a stronghold to the simple rank of a country residence testifies that here, possibly, some notable event may have taken place. But as the inhabitants have forgotten it, and have no care to search it out, they live in absolute indifference to a thing that is not their direct business. Their village appears to them like all other villages, their church, their houses, their fields, their beasts, like all other churches and houses and fields and beasts. They only vaguely take in the idea of other countries on the earth. The newspapers tell them of unknown lands and of strange doings; it all seems to belong to some other world. What does it matter to them, anyhow, since they have no intention of ever stirring,

and since nothing will ever happen to them? For them the past is without interest, and the future does not mar the peace of their slumbers. The present means the crops, the flocks, and the weather. For the things of Heaven there is the *curé*, for the things of earth there are the mayor, the notary, the customs officer, and the tax collector: a simplification of life.

Markets and fairs purvey to the restless cravings of such as are curious about outside happenings, but no inhabitant of Saint-Juirs would entertain the absurd idea that any trace of an event worth relating was to be found in his own village. Love itself is without drama, owing to the lack of stiffness in rustic morals, which precludes excesses of imagination by reducing to the proportions of newspaper items the conjunctions natural to our kind. There are, doubtless, disputes in Saint-Juirs as elsewhere, in connection with property rights, for "thine" and "mine," which are the foundation of "social order," are likewise a permanent cause of disorder among men. Trespassing in a pasture, the use of a well, a right of way, the branch of a tree reaching beyond a line, a hedge encroaching upon a ditch, result in quarrels, lawsuits, and dissension in families, the importance of which is no less to the small townspeople than was the feud between Capulets and Montagues to Verona. Centuries pass, the man of the past and the man of to-day meet on common ground in displaying the

same old violence, to which sometimes even the excuse of interests involved is wanting, as happened when Benvolio drew his sword upon a burgher of Verona who had taken the liberty to cough in the street, and thereby waked his dog asleep in the sunshine.

The peaceful inhabitant of Saint-Juirs is a stranger to such vagaries. Yet a Latin inscription above a door on the church square testifies to the fact that a local scholar took to heart those neighbourly quarrels to the point of wishing to leave some memory of them to posterity. A plain stone door-frame gives access to a little garden surrounded by high walls. Behind box hedges a house may be seen, rather broad than high, built apparently as far back as the last century, and looking much like other houses of the period. A servant comes out carrying a laundry basket. A woman is sewing at the window. The door closes again. Nothing more. Mechanically the eye travels back to the cracked stone whereon stands deeply engraved the following wise epigraph: "*Malus vicinus est grande malum.*"

I have often passed by, and while freely granting that a bad neighbour is indeed a great evil, have always wondered what epic strife was recorded by this dolorous exclamation. Was the inscription the vengeance of the impotent, the amiable irony of a philosopher, resigned to the inevitable, or the triumphant cry of the unrighteous, eager to deceive by

blaming for his own fault the inoffensive being who had no choice but to remain silent? I gazed at the house of God, twenty paces distant. I wondered whether this ecclesiastical Latin might not be ascribed to some man of the church. Who else would know the sacred language sufficiently well to attain this degree of epigraphic platitude? Was there not in the mildness of the method of revenge a flavour of the seminary? A real man harassed by a bad neighbour would have responded by blows in kind. A priest was more likely to strike back with a sentence out of the breviary. So I reflected, questioning the unanswering stone, and never dreaming that chance would one day bring me the solution of the problem.

Chance knocked at my door a few years ago in the shape of a little account book found in the study of a lawyer, my neighbour, and fallen through inheritance into the possession of a friend of mine. It is a manuscript copy-book of which only a dozen pages are covered by accounts. On the parchment cover the two words "*Malus vicinus*" met my eye. Turning over the blank pages I discovered that the little notebook had been commenced at both ends—accounts at the front, and notes at the back of the volume. I found various items of information concerning births, deaths, and inheritances. At the beginning the date 1811. The well-known names of several Saint-Juirs families passed under my

eyes. Then came the fateful title "Malus vicinus," followed by a long and terribly tangled story. It was the secret of the door that was there revealed to me. A priests' quarrel, as I had fancied.

The Abbé Gobert and the Abbé Rousseau, both natives of Saint-Juirs, had been ordained upon leaving the seminary of Luçon, in about 1760. The book contains nothing concerning their families. One may suppose them both to have been of good middle-class origin. Each manifestly had "a certain place in the sun." They were warm friends up to the time of their ordination, which brought about inevitable separation. Abbé Gobert was installed as vicar at Vieux Pouzauges whose *curé* was to sit in the Constituency among the partisans of the new order; Abbé Rousseau was sent to Mortagne-sur-Sèvres, in the heart of what was destined to be the territory of the Chouans.

Concerning their life up to the beginning of the Revolution we know nothing, except that they remained on friendly terms. They often visited each other. The walk from Pouzauges to Mortagne following the ridge of the hills of the Woodland is one of the most picturesque in our lovely western France, so rich in beautiful landscapes. Very pleasant are its valleys, watered by crystalline brooks flowing musically over pebbly beds; they are everywhere intersected by hedges behind which in serried ranks rise shady thickets, inviolate sanctuary of rural

peace. There might the peasant be born and die with never the least knowledge of the outer world. Thirty years ago specimens of the kind were still to be found. If, however, you follow one of the road-cuts under the heavy, overarching boughs and laboriously climb the steep rise amid granite rocks and thick tufts of gorse mingling with brambles, which drape themselves from one to another tree stump centuries old, you emerge suddenly and as if miraculously into the very sky, whence all the earth is visible. Northward as far as the Loire, where rise the towers of Saint Peter's in Nantes, westward as far as the sea, stretches an immense garden of verdure bathed in that translucent bluish light which unites earth and sky and gives the sense of our planet launched in infinite space. But to this day man and beast contemplate this marvellous spectacle with the same indifferent eye.

In those days, the preaching of the Gospel to peasants still stupefied from serfdom, by a clergy whose leaders prided themselves upon their unbelief, in nowise resembled the stultifying mummeries of to-day. When Abbé Gobert and Abbé Rousseau, arm in arm, stopped at some farmhouse for noonday rest after a frugal meal, their free speech would doubtless startle many a modern seminarist. Their views of the future were perhaps not very different. The ardent liberalism of the good *curé* of Pouzauges could not have been unknown to his vicar, and how could

the latter, open as he was to the new ideas, have refrained from unbosoming himself to his friend?

Meanwhile, every day witnessed the rising of the revolutionary tide. Under a tranquil surface, unknown forces were gathering for the devastating tempests soon to rage. Finally the hurricane broke loose, and its tornadoes of fire and iron shook the quiet Woodland. There was no time for reflection. Everyone was swept into the conflict without a chance to know his own mind. Abbé Rousseau, belonging to the "White Vendée," could not refuse to follow his boys when they asked him to accompany them, declaring that they were "going to fight God's battle." Abbé Gobert of the "Blue Vendée" found nothing to answer when his compatriots told him that they refused to make common cause with the foreigner against France, and that the Revolution was nothing more or less than the fulfilment of the Gospels on earth, despite the Pharisees of the ancient order, who while invoking the name of heaven appropriated all earthly privileges.

The adventures of the two Abbés during the war are not set down in the manuscript. There is mention of Abbé Rousseau being transferred to Stofflet's army, but no comment. Further on a note of three short lines in telegraphic style tells us that Abbé Gobert, "following his fatal bent," secularized himself, took up arms, and was left for dead at the taking of Fontenay. We are not told what saved him.

The writer of the little book now makes a jump to the Consulate, and we learn that the "reëstablishment of the cult," at the Concordat, resulted in the installation of Abbé Rousseau as officiating priest in his native place of Saint-Juirs. Three years later, Gobert, then a "refugee in Paris," where he "was writing for the newspapers," returned to his old home, his fortune having been increased by an inheritance from his uncle Jean Renaud, owner of the house now adorned by the Latin inscription. Destiny, after having violently separated the two men and set them at odds in a bitter war, now suddenly brought them together in their native place, where they might have the opportunity for an honest searching of their consciences, for justifications, and, before the end of life, possibly, reconciliation.

On the day after his arrival Gobert came face to face with Abbé Rousseau in the church square. He went straight to him, with hands outstretched. The other, not having had time to put himself on guard, was unable to withstand a friendly impulse. The eyes of each scrutinizingly questioned the other, but every dangerous word was avoided. The Abbé, moreover, cut short the interview with the excuse of being expected at the bedside of a sick man. They had parted with the understanding that they should soon see each other again, but two days later, Gobert, going up to the Abbé who was passing, received a curt bow from him, unaccompanied by a word of

even perfunctory courtesy. It meant the end of friendly intercourse. The meeting between the "annointed of the Lord" and the "unfrocked priest" had created a scandal in the community of the faithful, and Master Pierre Gaborit, President of the vestry board, had called his *curé* roundly to account. Could a chaplain of the King's armies afford to be seen consorting with a tool of Satan, a renegade living amid the filth of apostasy, a man who, the report ran, had danced the Carmagnole at the foot of the scaffold?

The disconcerted Abbé listened, shaking his head.

"He was a good fellow, and a godly one, when I knew him formerly, at the seminary. He is perhaps not as guilty as they say—I hoped to bring him back into the fold——"

"One does not bring back the Devil," replied Gaborit, violently. "You do not wish to be a stumbling block, do you, *Monsieur le Curé*?"

"No—no——" replied the Abbé, who already saw himself denounced, excommunicated, damned.

From that day onward relations between the priest and his ancient comrade limited themselves to a mutual raising of the hat, for the Abbé never found the courage to ignore "the renegade," as Gaborit would have wished him to. That is why the latter conceived the plan of forestalling any eventual relapse into weakness by fostering between the man of God and the man of the Devil every possible cause for enmity.

Abbé Rousseau owned the house next to Gobert's, and Gaborit had rented it for his newly married son. A party wall, a common well, contiguous fields and rights of way through them, were more than sufficient to give rise to daily friction. After some resistance, Abbé Rousseau, under the pretext that he could have "no dealings with Satan's emissary," let himself be convinced that he must refuse all customary "rights" to the "enemy." Gobert's remonstrances obtained no attention, and thereupon followed lawsuits. A bucket of lime was thrown into his well. The trees in his orchard were hacked with a bill hook. His hens disappeared. Investigation by a bailiff ensued, and the arrival of the police, who had first been to take instructions at the rectory. For a trifling bribe, the servant of the "accused" permitted the "revolutionary" cow to stray into the clerical hay field. This time Abbé Rousseau could do no less than to denounce the crime from the pulpit. A somewhat distorted version of the entire Revolution was rehearsed.

Gobert, who like Talleyrand, similarly unfrocked, would perhaps have ended in the arms of the Church, had he been important enough to stimulate the zeal of a Dupanloup, experienced more surprise than anger at all these vexations. What surprised him most was to find that justice was unjust. Having become a philosopher, however, he resigned himself. Only the loss of his friend caused him grief. He

ended by suspecting Gaborit's manœuvres, and several times sought opportunity for an explanation with Abbé Rousseau himself, but was met by obstinate silence.

It was then that, for the sake of reaching his former fellow student in spite of everything, by a word in the language familiar to both, he had had engraved on the lintel of his door the inscription which denounced Gaborit as the cause of their common misfortune. Daily, as he came out of his rectory, Abbé Rousseau could read the touching appeal which laid his guilt upon another. But the "glory of God" never permitted him to answer, as in the depth of his heart he would have liked to do.

He was the first to die. To the great scandal of all Gobert, "the excommunicated," followed him to the grave. On the very next day he gave orders to have the inscription removed, since it served no further purpose. The masons were soon at work, and a clumsy blow had already split the stone, when the ex-abbé was carried off suddenly by a pernicious fever. Things remained as they may be seen at the present day. Gobert went without church ceremonies to rest in the graveyard, not far from his old friend. They are still neighbours, but good neighbours, now, and for a long time!

AUNT ROSALIE'S INHERITANCE

IV

AUNT ROSALIE'S INHERITANCE

MADEMOISELLE ROSALIE RIGAL was by unanimous admission the most important person in the village. And yet the hamlet of St. Martin-en-Pareds, in the Woodland of the Vendée, boasts a former court notary who without great difficulty was allowed to drop out of the profession, and a retired sergeant of police who keeps the tobacconist's shop. Around these dignitaries are grouped a few well-to-do farmers and a dozen or more small landowners who, although obliged to work for a living, have a sense of their importance in the State. When they speak of "my field," "my cow," "my fence," the ring of their voice expresses the elation of the conqueror who in this infinite universe has set his clutch upon a portion of the planet and has no intention of letting go.

No one is unaware that the chief joy of country people is to surround themselves with hedges or walls, and to despise those who cannot do as much. That their admiration, their esteem, their respect, go out automatically to wealth is a trait they share with city people, which spares us the necessity of a detailed

psychological analysis. Who, then, shall explain the unanimous deference with which St. Martin-en-Pareds honoured Miss Rosalie Rigal?

The aged spinster—she was entering upon her seventieth year—possessed nothing under the sun but a tiny cottage, not in very good repair, but shining and spotless from front door steps to roof tiles, at the end of a narrow little garden scarcely wider than the path to her door. Such a domain was not calculated to attract to its mistress the admiring attention of her fellow townsmen. The interior of the dwelling was extremely modest. A large oaken bedstead with carved posts, a common deal dining table, a few rush-bottomed chairs and Miss Rosalie's armchair, were all the furniture of the room in which she lived. On the walls were holy pictures. On the mantelpiece a tarnished bronze gilt clock, representing a savage Turk carrying off on his galloping steed a weeping Christian maiden, had as far back as any one could remember pointed to a quarter before twelve.

At the window-door leading to the street and letting in the light of day Miss Rosalie sat with her knitting from sun-up to sun-down. Hence arose difficulties of entrance and exit. When a visitor appeared, Miss Rosalie would call Victorine. The servant would come, help her mistress to rise, as she did slowly and stiffly, move the armchair, settle the old woman in it again, propping her with special

cushions in stated places, move the foot stool or the foot warmer, push out of the way the little stand which served as a work table, and open the door with endless excuses for the delay.

No fewer ceremonies were necessary than in seeking an audience with the Sun-God. If Victorine were busy with the housework, she sometimes obliged a caller to wait. Which gave Miss Rosalie's door step a reputation as the most favourable spot in the entire canton for catching cold.

In spite of these inconveniences visitors were not wanting. Foremost among the assiduous ones were the notary and the *curé*. Monsieur Loiseau, the retired notary, was the friend of the house. A stout man, with a florid, smooth shaven face, and a head even smoother than his chin, always in a good humour, always full of amusing stories, yet concealing under his idle tales and his laughter a professional man's concern with serious matters, as was betokened by the ever-present white cravat, badge of his dignity, which added an official touch even to his hunting costume and to the undress of his gardening or vintaging attire.

The love of gardening was well developed in Monsieur Loiseau, and as he was especially fond of Miss Rosalie, he delighted in coming to hoe her flower beds, to tend her plants and water them, chatting with her the while. The old lady during this would be seated in the garden, near a spot where a deep niche in the wall had made it possible to cut a

loophole commanding the street. From her point of vantage she could watch all St. Martin, and without moving keep in touch with its daily events, which gave her inexhaustible food for comment.

So close became the friendship between these two, that the notary one day announced that if certain old documents once seen by him at the county town could be trusted, there was no doubt that their two families were related. From that moment Miss Rosalie Rigal became "Aunt Rosalie" to Monsieur Loiseau, and as the relationship was one which anybody might claim, Miss Rosalie soon found herself "Aunt" to the entire village. She duly appreciated the honour of this large connection, and with pride in the universal friendliness, which seemed to her a natural return for her own rather indiscriminate good will toward all, she let herself softly float on the pleasure of being held in veneration by everyone in St. Martin, which for her represented the universe.

The *curé*, who lived at two kilometers' distance, could come to see her only at irregular intervals. But a lift in a carriage, or even a friendly cart, often facilitated the journey, and although Aunt Rosalie was not in the least devout, despite the saintly pictures on her walls, the long conversations between her and the *curé*, from which the notary was excluded, gave rise to the popular belief that they had "secrets" together.

And the supposition was correct. There were

“secrets” between Aunt Rosalie and the priest. There were likewise “secrets” between Aunt Rosalie and the notary, and they were, to be plain, money secrets. For the irresistible attraction which drew all St. Martin-en-Pareds to Aunt Rosalie’s feet must here be explained. The simple-minded old spinster supposed it the most natural thing in the world; she fancied her amiable qualities sufficient to engage the benevolent affection of all who knew her. Undeniably Aunt Rosalie’s good humour and quiet fun were infinitely calculated to foster friendly neighbourly relations. But there was more to it than the uninquiring good soul suspected.

Aunt Rosalie was a poor relation of certain enormously rich people in the neighbouring canton. She was a grand niece of the famous Jean Bretaud, whose lucky speculations had made him the most important man in the district. The Bretauds had entirely forgotten the relationship and, taking the opposite course from the notary, would probably have denied it had Aunt Rosalie claimed it.

Aunt Rosalie claimed nothing, but she did not forget her family. When evening fell, and the blinds were closed, and the doors securely locked: “Victorine, go and bring the documents,” she would say, after a glance all around to make sure that no one could spy on her in the mysterious elaborations of the work under way. At these words, Victorine, with sudden gravity, would extract from the wardrobe a

little flat box, cunningly tied with string, and place it respectfully on the table, after having with much ado untied the knots and unrolled the complicated wrappings which guarded the treasure from the gaze of the profane.

The treasure was simply a genealogy of the Bretauds with authentic documents to support it. As soon as the papers had been spread out under the lamplight, and set in order, the work would begin. The point was to discover what catastrophes would have to occur in the Bretaud family before the millions could fall into Aunt Rosalie's purse. A considerable number of combinations were conceivable, and it was to the examination of them all that Aunt Rosalie and Victorine devoted their nightly labour. A quantity of sheets of white paper covered with pencil scribbling showed incredible entanglements of calculation and rudimentary arithmetical systems.

"Well, now, how far had we got?" said Aunt Rosalie.

"We had ended with the death of your grand niece Eulalie, Miss," said Victorine.

"Ah, yes, the dear child. The fact is, that if she were to die it would help greatly. There are still two cousins left who would have claims prior to mine, it is true. But they have very poor health in that branch of the family."

"I heard the other day that there was an epidemic of scarlet fever in their neighbourhood."

“Ah! Ah!”

“And then they go to Paris so often. A railway accident might so easily happen.”

“Ah, yes! It is a matter of a minute——”

And they would continue in that tone for a good hour, warming up to it, comparing the advantages between the demise of this one and that one.

As soon as a Bretaud received a hypothetical inheritance from some relative, he was set down on Victorine's slip of paper as deceased. Presently there was strewn around these gentle maniacs on the subject of inheritance a very hecatomb of Bretauds, such as the eruption of Vesuvius which blotted out Pompeii would not more than have sufficed to bring about. Herself on the edge of the grave, this septuagenarian built up her future on the dead bodies of children, youths, men and women in the flower of life, whom she theoretically massacred nightly, with a quiet conscience, before going to sleep, she who would not willingly have hurt the smallest fly!

When Aunt Rosalie's table had assumed the aspect of a vast cemetery, they began their reckonings. If only eleven people were to die in a certain order, Aunt Rosalie would get so and so much. If fourteen, she would acquire another and fatter sum. Change the order, and there would be a new combination. They assessed fortunes, and if they did not agree in their valuations, they split the difference. But

whatever happened, the discussion always ended by Aunt Rosalie receiving an enormous inheritance. Be it noted that whenever a real death or birth took place, the combinations were disturbed, the game had to be commenced all over on a new basis. This afforded fresh pleasure.

But the supreme joy lay in the distribution of the heritage. Neither Aunt Rosalie nor Victorine had any use for their treasures. Without personal needs, the harmless yet implacable dreamers experienced before the fantastic riches fallen to them from Heaven the delightful embarrassment of human creatures provided with the chance to be a shining example of all the virtues at very small cost to themselves. Victorine had never cared to receive her wages, and did not dream of claiming them, living as she did in the constant vision of barrells of gold. Set down in the will for 50,000 francs, no more, she was only too happy to participate royally in her mistress's generosity.

Two account books were ready at hand. One for the distribution of legacies, and the other for "investments." Both presented an inextricable tangle of figures scratched out, rewritten, and then again scratched out for fresh modifications.

"Yesterday," said Rosalie, "we gave 100,000 francs to the hospital at La Roche-sur-Yon. That is a great deal."

"Not enough, Miss," took up Victorine. "I

meant to speak of it; 100,000 for the sick! What can they do with that?"

"Perhaps you are right. Let us say 150,000."

"No, Miss, 200,000."

"Very well, say 200,000. I do not wish to distress you for so little."

"And the Church?"

"Ah, yes, the Church——"

"You cannot refuse to give God His share, Miss, after He has given you so much!"

"Quite true. Next week I shall add something in my will."

And for an hour the discussion would continue in this tone. The results were duly consigned to the secret account book, and then would follow the question of investments.

"Monsieur Loiseau tells me that the Western Railway shares have dropped. He advises me to buy Northern. He says that Northern means Rothschild, which means a good deal, you understand, Victorine."

"That Monsieur Loiseau knows everything! You must do as he says. Me, I don't know anything about such things."

"Well, then, put down Northern instead of Western shares. As for the dividends, they talk of changing the rate of interest."

"What does that mean?"

"It is just a way of making us lose money."

“What then?”

“Well, then, we may have to get rid of our stock. I will talk it over with Monsieur Loiseau to-morrow, and perhaps also with the good *curé* who is very well informed in these matters. Make a cross before those shares, so that I may not forget.”

And Aunt Rosalie actually did ply notary and *curé* with questions about her investments, and the use to be made of her fortune after her death.

These two had acquired a liking for the topic. On the day when Aunt Rosalie, questioned by him with regard to her direct heirs, declared that as she had seen none of the Bretauds for more than forty years she “had decided not to leave any of them a penny’s worth of her property,” the *curé* began pleading for the Church, for the Pope, and for his charities. His efforts were amply rewarded, for Aunt Rosalie, though not perhaps satisfying all his demands, generously wrote him down for large sums, of which she handed him the list, with great mystery. In return for which she received the confidential assurance of eternal felicity, although she never performed any of her religious duties.

The notary, scenting something of this in the air, before long insinuated delicately that he would be glad of a “remembrance” from his old friend. How could she refuse, when his suggestions in the matter of investments were so valuable?

“Give me good information and advice, Monsieur

Loiseau," said Aunt Rosalie, with a kind smile. "You shall be rewarded. I will not forget you."

And from time to time, by a codicil, of which he had taught her the form, she would add something in her will to the sum she intended for the good notary. Whereupon he would exert himself with renewed diligence in her garden, which he jovially called "hoeing Aunt Rosalie's will."

Such things could not be kept secret. St. Martin-en-Pareds soon knew that Aunt Rosalie had great wealth, which they surmised had come to her through the generosity of her great uncle Bretaud. Having quarrelled with her "heirs," she would leave everything to her "friends." Who could withstand such generous affection as was exhibited toward her? Following the example of the notary, all St. Martin had by the claim of friendship become relatives. And visits were paid her, and good wishes expressed, accompanied by gifts in produce, eggs, fruits, vegetables, bacon, or chickens, all of which the good "Aunt" accepted with a pretty nodding of her head, accompanied by an "I shall not forget you!" which everyone stored in memory as something very precious.

Aunt Rosalie constantly received, and never gave. Even the poor got only promises for the future. Nothing did so much to rivet her in the public esteem. Her reputation for blackest avarice was the surest guarantee that the hoard would be enormous.

Things had gone on like this for more than thirty years, when Aunt Rosalie was carried off in two days by an inflammation of the lungs. Victorine, in stupefaction, watched her die, thinking of the inheritance which had not come, but which could not have failed to come eventually, if only the old Aunt had continued to live. When the dead woman was cold, Victorine, who was alone with her in the middle of night, ran to the box of documents, muttering over and over, in an access of positive madness: "No one will get anything, no one will get anything!" and threw the box into the fire.

As she stood poking the bundle to make it kindle, a flame caught her petticoats. The wretched creature was burned alive, without a soul to bring her help.

Monsieur Loiseau, anxious for news, arrived on the spot at dawn and discovered the horrible sight. The fire had crept to the bed. Sheets of charred paper covered with figures fluttering about the room exposed Victorine's crime, which had been followed by punishment so swift. When the official seals had been removed, after the funeral, no trace of funds could be found, nor any last will and testament. All the notary's searching led to nothing.

It was concluded that Victorine, an "agent of the Bretauds," had made everything disappear. Wrath ran high. There rose a chorus of angry wailing and gnashing of teeth.

"Ah, the money will not be lost!" people said, heaping maledictions upon the "thief." "The Bretauds will know, well enough, where to look for the treasure!"

"Poor dear Aunt!" each of them added, mentally. "So rich, so kindly disposed toward us! And that beast of a servant had to go and——"

As a sort of protest against the Bretauds, Aunt Rosalie was provided by subscription with a beautiful white marble grave stone, while the charred remains of Victorine, thrust in a despised corner of the cemetery, were consigned to public contempt.

Such is the world's justice.

GIDEON IN HIS GRAVE

V

GIDEON IN HIS GRAVE

EVERYONE connected with the Cloth Market of Cracow still remembers Gideon the Rich, son of Manasseh, who excelled in the cloth trade and died in the pathways of the Lord. Not only for his prosperity was Gideon notable. He was universally regarded as “a character,” and the man truly had been gifted by Heaven with a combination of qualities—whether good or bad, yet well balanced—setting him apart from the common herd.

Gideon was a thick, rotund little Jew, amiable in appearance to the point of joviality, with a fresh pink and white face in which two large emotional blue eyes, always looking ready to brim over, bathed his least words, whether of pity or business, with generous passions. Being an orthodox Jew, he naturally wore a long, black levitical coat which concealed his swinging woollen fringes. Where his abundant gray hair met with his silky beard (unprofaned by shears) hung the two long *paillès*, cabalistic locks which Jehovah loves to see brushing the temples of the faithful. When the whole was

topped by a tall hat, impeccably lustrous, and Gideon appeared in the Soukinitza, silence spread, as all gazed at the noble great-coat (of silk or of cloth, according to the season) whose pockets offered a safe asylum to the mysteries of universal trade.

Never suppose that such authority was a result of chance or any sudden bold grasping of advantage. It was the fruit of long endeavour, continually fortunate because he never embarked on an enterprise or a combination without laborious calculations, in which all chances favourable or adverse had been duly weighed. Manasseh had acquired a very modest competence in the old clothes business, and everyone knows that the old clothes of the Polish Jews are young when the rest of mankind consider them past usefulness. One cannot accumulate any great fortune in this business, which is why Gideon, at Manasseh's death, sold his paternal inheritance and went unostentatiously to occupy the meanest booth in the Cloth Market.

At first no one took any notice of him. The shops in that market are little more than wardrobes. The doors fold back and become show-cases. The proprietor sits on a chair in the middle, and the passer will hardly get by without being deluged with reasons for buying exactly the entire contents of the shelves. Gideon, at the front of his black cave, lighted only by the big, hollow, smouldering eyes of his mother, seated motionless for hours on a heap of

rags, thought himself in a palace fit for kings. Dazzled but calm, he skillfully spread his striking wares to tempt the passer. Others ran after possible purchasers, soliciting them, bothering them. The modest display which depended upon nothing but its attractiveness obtained favour. "It may be cheaper in there," people said, and submitted to persuasion. It was the beginning of a great destiny.

Twenty years later Gideon, now surnamed "the Rich," had a wife and children, whom he kept busy under the noisy arcade brightened by the rainbow colours of silks for sale. He had clung to his humble counter and was never willing to change it for another. He himself was seldom found there; he was elsewhere occupied with large transactions planned in the silence of the night. Rachel and his two sons, Daniel and Nathan, represented him at the Soukinitza, where he only showed himself to inquire concerning orders. There he would chatter for hours with the peasants on market days, to make a difference of a few kreutzers in the price of a piece of gossamer silk. No profit is too small to be worth making. This is the principle of successful firms. His conduct excited the admiration of all. How, furthermore, begrudge to Gideon his dues in honour, when he was constantly bestowing hundreds of florins upon schools, synagogues, and every sort of charitable institution?

For Gideon had a dual nature, as, brethren, is the

case with many of us. In business the subtle art of his absorbing rapacity circumvented any attempt to lessen his profits by the shaving of a copper. "It is not for myself that I work," he used to say, "it is for the poor." And as this came near being the truth, people were afraid of appearing heartless if they opposed him. They let themselves be caught by his smiling good humour, his friendly familiar talk, and they were, after all, not much deceived in him, for Gideon, though a victor in life's bitter struggle, was happiest when stretching out a brotherly hand to the vanquished. In the same way, those American billionaires whose immoderate accumulations of wealth spread ruin all around them will anxiously question the first comer as to the most humanitarian way of spending the fortune thus acquired. I know of someone who when asked by that foolish ogre, Carnegie, what he should do with his money, answered: "Return it to those from whom you took it!"

Gideon could hardly have looked upon the matter in that light. He would never have asked advice of any one in reference either to amassing or to returning money. His chief interest, very nearly as important as his business schemes, was religion. The poetry of Judaism roused in him an ardour that nothing could satisfy but the feeling of substantially contributing to the traditional work of his fathers. His charitable gifts were simply a result. His object was the fulfilment of "the Law."

Daniel and Nathan, brought up in the same ideas, lived in silent respect for their father's authority. In Israel, ever since the days of the patriarchs, the head of the house has been, as with all Oriental peoples, an absolute monarch. The sons of Gideon could therefore feel no regret at their father's generosity. Like their father, they placed the service of Jehovah above everything else. Having, however, been reared by him, and taught all the combinations of exchange by which you get as much and give as little as you can, they were conscious of possessing invincible capacities for acquisition.

"They have something better than money," Gideon would say, "they know how to make it."

On one point alone could, possibly, some ferment of dissension in the family have been found. Gideon took a rich man's pride in living modestly. He never would have more than one servant in the house. The young men, with vanity of a different kind, would have delighted in dazzling the twelve tribes. As they were not given the necessary means, they made up their minds to migrate. During the long evenings of a whole winter nothing else was talked of. Gideon did not begrudge the very considerable outlay involved, knowing that it was a good investment. Only one consideration troubled him at the thought of launching his progeny "in the cities of the West." Under penalty of closing the avenues to social success, they would be

obliged to relinquish the orthodox long coat and clip off the two corkscrew locks on their temples. Without attaching too much importance to these outward signs, Gideon grieved over what seemed to him a humiliating concession.

"Father," said Daniel, "in Russia the orthodox Jews are obliged to cut their hair, in conformity with an edict of the Czar. But even without *paillès* Jehovah receives them in his bosom, for it is a case of superior force."

"Yes, that is it, superior force," said Gideon, nodding assent. "The only thing that troubles me is that I have always noticed that one concession leads to another. Where shall you stop? One of these days you may think it necessary to your social success to become Christians!"

"That! . . . Never!" cried Daniel and Nathan in one voice, horror-stricken.

"I know, I know that you have no such intention. Like me, you are penetrated by the greatness of our race, and like me you stand in admiration before the miracles of destiny. By their holy books the Jews have conquered the West. Upon our thought the thought of our rulers has been modelled. That, you must know, is the fundamental reason for their reviling us; they are aware of having nothing but brutal force to help them, and of living upon our genius. Though vanquished, we are their masters. Even in their heresy, which is a Jewish heresy, they

proclaim the superiority of the children of Jehovah. When their God was incarnate in man, his choice fell upon a Jewish woman. He was born a Jew. He promised the fulfilment of the Law. His apostles were Jews. Go into their temples. You will see nothing but statues of Jews which they worship on their knees. How sad a thing it is, when signs of our grace are so striking on all sides, to see the wealthiest among us seeking alliances with the barbarous aristocracy who subjugated us. Some of them, while remaining Jews, make donations to the church of Christ, so as to win the favour of nations and kings. Others submit to the disgrace of baptism. Should you, Daniel, or you, Nathan, commit such a crime, I should curse you, if living; if dead, I should turn in my grave."

Terrified by this portentous threat, Daniel and Nathan, rising with a common impulse, swore, calling upon the Lord, to live as good Jews, like their forefathers.

"That is well done," said Gideon. "I accept your oath. Remember that if you break it, I shall turn in my grave."

Nathan and Daniel acquired great wealth by every means that the law tolerates. Gideon was gathered to his fathers. In accordance with his will, the greater part of his fortune was distributed in charities. A considerable sum, however, fell to each of his sons, accompanied by a letter in which affection

had dictated final injunctions. The last word was still: "If ever one of you should become a Christian, —forswear the pure faith of Abraham for Christian idolatry, I should turn in my grave."

Time passed. Daniel and Nathan, loaded with riches, had friends in society, at court, and most especially among those great lords who in the midst of their reckless magnificence may sometimes be accommodated by a pecuniary service. Daniel wished to marry. The daughter of an impoverished prince was opportunely at hand. But his conversion was required. The Vatican conferred a title upon him. From the class of mere manipulators of money, the son of the Cloth Market was raised to the higher sphere of world politics. Daniel did not hesitate. His absent brother coming home found him turned into a Christian count.

No violent scene ensued between the two sons of Gideon. Nathan understood perfectly. One thought, however, tormented him.

"I agree with you," he said, "that the Christians are but a sect of Israel, that they are sons of the synagogue, and that you remain loyal in spirit to our faith, though overlaid by debatable additions. The fact none the less remains that we had given our oath to our father. . . . He foresaw only too well the thing that has occurred. And you know what he said: 'I shall turn in my grave.'"

"One says that sort of thing——"

“Gideon, son of Manasseh, was not the man to speak idle words. Think of it, Daniel, if we were to lift the grave stone and our eyes were to behold——”

“Nathan, say no more, I beg of you. The mere thought turns me cold with fear.”

The two brothers, formerly indissolubly united, drew away from each other little by little: Daniel, forgetful, cheerfully disposed, a nobleman not altogether free from arrogance, amiably deceived by his Christian spouse, but with or without this assistance becoming the founder of a great family; Nathan, morose, restless, smoulderingly envious of a happiness paid too high for, in his opinion. When a question of interest brought them together for a day, Nathan always ended by returning to his theme:

“Our father said: ‘I shall turn in my grave!’”

Whereupon Daniel, finding nothing to reply, cut short the interview.

Then, suddenly, Nathan dropped sadness for mirth, severity for indulgence, stopped sermonizing and smiled instead at other people’s faults. The change struck Daniel the more from twice meeting his brother without a word being spoken about their father and his terrible threat. Finally he found the key to the mystery: Nathan had in his turn received baptism and was about to become the happy bridegroom of a widow without fortune whom an act of the royal sovereign authorized to bestow upon her consort a feudal title threatened with falling to

female succession. In gratitude, Nathan had promised that Daniel and he would "supervise" a future loan.

"So!" cried Daniel in anger, when he heard the great news. "You are becoming a Christian, too, after viciously tormenting me on every occasion, and reminding me of our father who on my account had 'turned in his grave.' And I was filled with remorse. Yes, I may have seemed happy, but my sleep was troubled. I did not know what to do. There were times when I even contemplated returning to the synagogue. Well, then, if what you tell me is true, if our father actually has turned in his grave, you will admit that you are now to blame as well as I. Come, speak, what have you to say?"

"I say," replied Nathan, undisturbed, "that I have shown myself in this the more devoted son of the two. I take back nothing of what I said. It is you assuredly who caused Gideon, son of Manasseh, to turn in his grave. About that there is no doubt whatever. But thanks to the act to which I have resigned myself, he has undoubtedly turned back again, according to his solemn promise, and there he lies henceforth just as we buried him, and as he must remain forever. I have retrieved your fault. Our father forgives you. I accept your thanks."

SIMON, SON OF SIMON

VI

SIMON, SON OF SIMON

SIMON, son of Simon, was nearing the end of his career without having tasted the fruits of his untiring effort to acquire the riches which may be said to represent happiness. Whether we be the sons of Shem or of Japheth, each of us strives for the representative symbol of the satisfaction of his particular cravings. Not that Simon, son of Simon, of the tribe of Judah, had ever given much thought to the joys that were to come from his possession of treasure. No, the question of the possible use to be made of a pile of money had never occupied his active but simple mind. The satisfaction of money-lust having been his single aim, he had never looked forward to any enjoyment other than that of successful money getting. Fine raiment appealed to him not at all. The safest thing, after snaring wealth on the wing, is to conceal it under poverty, lest we lead into temptation the wicked, ever ready to appropriate the goods of their neighbours. Jewels, rare gems, precious vessels, delicate porcelain, rugs, tapestries, luxurious dwellings, horses, none of these awakened his desire. He cared nothing

for them, and had no understanding of the vain-glorious joys to be derived from their possession. Neither did he yearn for fair persons—sometimes containing a soul—obtainable at a price for ineffable delight. Simon, son of Simon, had a very vague notion of the esthetic superiority of one daughter of Eve above another, and would not have given a farthing for the difference between any two of them.

His ingenuous desire was concerned solely with coined metal. Gold, silver, bronze, cut into disks and stamped with an effigy, seemed to him, as in fact they are, the greatest marvel of the world. The thought of collecting them, carefully counted in bags—making high brown, white, or yellow piles of them in coffers with intricate locks—filled him with superhuman joy. And so great is the miracle of metal, even when absent and represented only by a sheet of paper supplied with the necessary formulæ and bearing imposing signatures along with the stamp of Cæsar, that the delight of it in that form was no less. Some, with a cultivated taste in such matters, tell us indeed that the delight is enhanced by the thought of safeguarding from the world's cupidity so great a treasure in a bulk so small.

All of this, however, Simon, son of Simon, had tasted only in dream visions, finding it infinitely delectable even so. How would he have felt, had reality kept pace with the flight of a delirious

imagination? But such happiness seemed not to be the portion of the miserable Jew, who had so far vainly exerted himself to win gold. Gold for the sake of gold, not for the vain pleasures, the empty shells, for which fools give it in exchange. Gold was beautiful, gold was mighty, gold was sovereign of the world. If Simon, son of Simon, had attempted to picture Jehovah, he would have conceived of him as gold stretching out to infinity, filling all space! Meanwhile, he trailed shocking old slippers through the mud of his Galician village, and arrayed himself in a greasy, ragged garment on which the far-spaced clean places stood out like spots. He was a poor man, you would have thought him an afflicted one, but the golden rays of an indefatigable hope lighted his life.

He walked by the guidance of a star, the golden star of a dream which would end only with the dreamer. He was always busy. Always on the eve of some lucky stroke. Never on the day after it. The things he had attempted, the combinations he had constructed, the traps he had set for human folly, would worthily fill a volume. It seemed as if his genius lacked nothing necessary for success. Yet he always failed, and had acquired a reputation for bad luck. He had travelled much, taken part in large enterprises, to which he contributed ideas that proved profitable to someone else. He could buy and sell on the largest or the smallest scale. He

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dealt in every ware that is sold in the open market as well as every one that is bargained for in secret, from honours—and honour—to living flesh, from glory to love. And now, here he was, stripped of illusions—I mean illusions on the subject of his fellowman—dreaming for the thousandth time of holding a winning hand in the game.

The sole confidant of his dreams was his son Ochosias, a youth of great promise, initiated by him into all the mysteries of commerce. Ochosias profited by his lessons and was not lacking in gifts, but never rose to his father's sublime heights. He had a preference for the money trade.

"Money," said he, "is the finest merchandise of all. Purchase, sale, loan, are all profitable for one knowing how to handle it. If you will give your consent, father, I will establish myself as a banker—by the week."

"You are crazy," answered Simon, son of Simon. "The money trade certainly has advantages perceptible even to the dullest wit. But in order to deal with capital, capital you must have, or else find some innocent Gentile to lend it you at an easy rate. Before doing this, however, he will ask for securities. Where are your securities?"

And as the other shrugged his shoulders—

"Listen," continued the man of experience, "the time has come to submit to you a plan that has been haunting me and from which I expect a rare profit."

"Speak, speak, father," cried Ochosias, eagerly, with such a racial quiver at the words "rare profit" as a war-horse's at a bugle call.

"Listen," said Simon with deliberation, "I have long revolved in my mind the history of my life. I can say without vanity that nowhere is Simon, son of Simon, surpassed in business ability. Should you, Ochosias, live to be the age of the patriarchs, you might meet with one more fortunate than your father, but one more expert in trade—never. And yet I have not been successful . . . at least, not up to the present time. For the future is in the hands of Jehovah alone by whom all things are decided."

The two men bowed devoutly in token of submission to the Lord.

"What, then, has been wanting?" continued Simon, son of Simon, following up his thought. "Nothing within myself, I say it without any uncertainty as to my pride being justifiable. Nothing within myself, everything outside of myself. It is no secret. Everyone proclaims it aloud. Ask anybody you please. Everyone will tell you: 'Simon, son of Simon, is no ordinary Jew.' Some will even add: 'He is the greatest Jew of his time.' I do not go as far as that. We must always leave room for another. But you will find opinion unanimous in respect to one curious statement: 'Simon, son of Simon, has no luck. All that he has lacked is

luck.' There you have the simple truth. There is nothing further to say."

"Well——?" inquired Ochosias, breathlessly, scenting something new in the air.

"Well, one must have luck, that is the secret, and, I tell you plainly, I mean to have it."

"How?"

"It is within reach of all, my child. You cannot fail to see it. A state institution, through the care of the Emperor Francis Joseph, Christian of Christ, distributes good luck impartially to every subject of the Empire, whether Christian, Jew, or Mahomedan."

"The lottery?" asked Ochosias, and pouted his lips disdainfully.

"The lottery, you have said it, the lottery which graciously offers us every day a chance of which we neglect to avail ourselves."

"Unless, of course," mused the youth, with a brightening countenance, "you know of some way to draw the winning number——"

"Good. I was sure that blood would presently speak. You are not far from guessing right."

"But, come now. Seriously. You know of some such means?"

"Perhaps. Tell me, who is the master of luck?"

"Jehovah. You yourself just said so."

"Yes, Jehovah, or some god of the outsiders, if any there be mightier than Jehovah, which I cannot believe."

“Other gods may be mighty, like Baal, or like Mammon, who ought by no means to be despised. But Jehovah is the greatest of all. He said: ‘I am the Eternal.’ And He is.”

“Doubtless. There are, however, more mysteries in this world than we can grasp, and Jehovah permits strange usurpations by other Celestial Powers.”

“It is for the purpose of trying us.”

“I believe it to be so. But I have no more time to waste in mistakes. And so I have said to myself: ‘Adonai, the Master, holds luck in his hands. According to my belief, that master is Jehovah. He just might, however, be Christ, or Allah, or another. I shall, if necessary, exhaust the dictionary of the Gods of mankind, which is, I am told, a bulky volume. Whoever is the mightiest God, him must we tempt, seduce, or, to speak plainly, buy.’ That is what I have resolved to do. I shall naturally begin the experiment with Jehovah, the God of Abraham and of Solomon, whom I worship above all others. To-morrow is the Sabbath. To-day I will go and purchase a ticket for the imperial lottery, the grand prize of which is five hundred thousand florins, and to-morrow, bowed beneath the veil, in the temple of the Lord, I shall promise to give him, if I win——”

“Ten thousand florins!” Ochosias bravely proposed.

“Ten thousand grains of sand!” cried Simon, son

of Simon. "Would you be stingy toward your Creator? Ten thousand florins! Do you think that in the world we live in one can subsidize a Divinity, a first-class one, for that price? Triple donkey! Know that I shall offer Jehovah one hundred thousand florins! One hundred thousand florins! What do you think of it? That is how one behaves when he is moved by religious sentiments."

The amazed Ochosias was silent. After a pause, however, he murmured:

"You are right, father, in these days one cannot get a God, a real one, under that figure. But a hundred thousand florins! You must own that it is frightful to hand over such a pile of money even to Jehovah."

"Ochosias, in business one must know how to be lavish. With your ten thousand florins I should never win the grand prize. Whilst with my hundred thousand—— We shall see."

And Simon, son of Simon, did as he had said. He bought his lottery ticket, he took a solemn oath before the Torah to devote, should he win, a hundred thousand florins to Jehovah, and then he waited quietly for three months, to learn that his was not the winning number.

Ochosias and Simon, son of Simon, thereupon deliberated. To which God should they next turn their attention? For some reason Jehovah had lost power. Was it possible that the centuries had

strengthened some other God against him? Strange things happen. Still, Ochosias ventured the suggestion that Jehovah with the best will in the world might have been bound by some previous engagement.

“Any other Jew to have promised a hundred thousand florins to the Eternal?” uttered Simon, son of Simon, sententiously. “No! I am the only one capable of a stroke of business such as that!”

But upon the insistence of Ochosias, whose faith in Jehovah remained unshaken, he was willing to try again. This time he waited six months . . . with the same result.

It then became necessary to make a decision, and the two men agreed that after Jehovah the honour of the next trial was due to his son Jesus, a Jew, offspring of the Jew Joseph and the Jewess Mary. So Simon, son of Simon, bought another lottery ticket and hastened to the church of Christ where, having been properly sprinkled with holy water, he knelt according to the custom of the place, and pledged himself solemnly, in case he won the grand prize, to present the Crucified with a hundred thousand florins. Having given his word, Simon, son of Simon, looked all around him in the hope of some sign, but seeing nothing that could concern him he retired, not without repeating his promise and gratifying the Deity with a few supplementary genuflexions.

Time passed. Simon, son of Simon, and Ochosias went about their ordinary occupations, taking great care to utter no word that could give offence to the Power whose favour they were seeking. Jehovah remained during this long period exiled, as it were, from their thoughts. What if the Other should be jealous?

And then, of a sudden, the miracle! Simon, son of Simon, won the grand prize. At first he doubted, fearing some trick of the invisible powers. But in the end he was obliged to accept the evidence. The Most Catholic bank paid the money, and soon the five hundred thousand florins were safely bestowed.

After a few twitches of nervous trembling, Simon, son of Simon, regained command over himself. But he was visibly sunk in deep thought. Vainly the agitated Ochosias plied him with questions. Such answers as he obtained were vague and unsatisfactory. "Oh," and "Ah," and "Perhaps," and "We shall see," which in no wise revealed what lay in the other's mind. Finally, Ochosias could no longer restrain himself. He must know what was going on in his father's soul, for his own was torn by a dreadful doubt. The genius of Simon, son of Simon, was marvellous, it had opened the way for him to recalcitrant fortune, and in the natural course of things he, Ochosias, would presently through death's agency be placed in possession of the treasure. But here was a difficulty. Could one grant that Jehovah had no power left and that Christ was all-powerful?

Ochosias shuddered at the thought, for, after all, if Christ had greater power than the One who was formerly all-powerful, if supreme power had devolved upon Christ, then to Christ must one bow. Conversion would be inevitable. To leave the temple of Jehovah for the altars of his enemy and pay, into the bargain, an enormous fee? Horrible!

In hesitating and fragmentary talk Ochosias made the sorrowful avowal of his anguish.

“Must we believe that Jesus is mightier than Jehovah? What consequences would such a belief involve! Is it possible that the religion of Jesus is the true one? No, no, it cannot be! What are your thoughts on the subject, father?”

“Man of little faith, who hast doubted,” spoke Simon, son of Simon, softly, with a flash as of lightning in his eye. “Let me reassure thee who have not doubted. Clearly I perceive the true significance of events. Jehovah is not one whom we can deceive, even unintentionally. To Him all things are known. He foresees all, and works accordingly. The proof that He is mightier than Jesus is that He perfectly understood on both occasions that I should never be able to part with the hundred thousand florins I so rashly promised. He knows our hearts. He does not expect the impossible. The Other was taken in by my good faith, which deceived even myself. Jehovah alone is great, my son.”

“Jehovah alone is great,” repeated Ochosias, his soul divinely eased by the lifting off it of a great weight.

And both men, with foreheads bowed before the Almighty, worshipped.

AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

VII

AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

BURIED in silence, the city slept under the friendly moon. With the setting of the sun, activities had slowed, then halted in temporary death, and over the noisy pavements had fallen the peace of the grave. Divine sleep by oblivion shielded the children of men from evil and by dreams comforted them with hope. Some of the windows, however, were kept alight by love, or suffering, or labour. The hushed street, touched with bluish light, emerged from shadow here and there, and as abruptly dropped into it again. Where three converging roads ended in a public square, the water of fountains murmured around the great stone base of a bloodstained crucifix.

The street of the people, "*everybody's street*," as it was also called, was recognizable by its neglect of the customary city ordinances. A narrow track of aggressive cobblestones, amid which the sewage trailed its odours, wound between high, mouldy walls, and led from their dens to the foot of the Divine Image the sad, long procession of those who are not of the elect. The citizen's road, "*the middle road*," as

some called it, offered greater convenience to its travellers. Wide, airy, drained according to the latest hygienic system, salubriously paved with wood, bordered by sumptuous shops where all the pleasant things of life were on sale, this road invited idleness to leisurely promenades, invariably ending, however, at the foot of the cross. For greater certainty, a moving platform took people thither, saving them the trouble of exerting themselves. As to the way of the elect, likewise called "*the way of the few*," it stretched along triumphantly, indescribable in splendour, amid monuments of art, statues, marvellous trees, blossoming bowers, fragrant lawns, singing birds, all that the utmost refinement of luxury could devise for human felicity. There were even, at stated hours, fair traffickers in delight, artfully adorned, who moved about in accordance with a prescribed order, selling heaven on earth to whomsoever had the price to pay. In commodious coaches drawn by six gold-caparisoned horses these repaired like the rest to the crossroads where in His patient anguish the God awaited them. Motionless, from the height of His gibbet, He gazed down upon it all with ineffable sadness, as if He said: "Is this what I laboured for?"

And now, on the three avenues which even during the hours of sleep preserve their characteristics, shadows are seen moving. Their outlines increase in distinctness, and one after the other three human

figures issue from the three roads into the flickering lamplight of the square.

The man from "*the low road*," hugging the wall, advances timidly, with hesitating step, yet like one driven by a higher power. A stranger to fear, the man of "*the middle road*" advances with tranquil eye, securely bold, knowing that others have care for his safety. *Incessu patuit Homo*. The man from "*the road of the few*" treads the earth as if he owned it, and seems to call the stars to witness that he is the supreme justification of the universe. Each with his different gait, they proceed toward their goal, which fate has made identical. At the foot of the cross, whose massive base had until that moment concealed them from one another, they suddenly come face to face, under the gaze of Him whom their ancestors nailed to the ignominious tree.

Three simultaneous cries cross in the air.

"Ephraim!"

"Samuel!"

"Mordecai!"

"What are you doing here?"

"And you?"

"And you?"

Silence falls, as each waits for an answer.

"Three Jews at the foot of the cross!" said Ephraim of *the low road*.

"Three renegade Jews," said Mordecai of *the tribe of the few*, below breath. "For we are Christians."

“Renegade is not the word, brother,” objected Samuel *of the middle class*, softly. “Apostasy is the name for those who go over to the beliefs of the minority. The others are converts.”

“Admirably expressed, Samuel,” said Ephraim. “You are a wise man. Why should I take the trouble to lie to you? I have come here alone, by night, because having changed Lord, I need compensating gifts, and—God, though He has become Jesus, son of Joseph, cannot hear me when His crowd of courtiers is besieging Him with clamorous petitions. Therefore I come sometimes to speak to Him as man to God. And who knows? Perhaps if I help myself sufficiently my words will be heard.”

“I will not deny,” said Samuel, “that I am here with the same object.”

“My case differs in nothing from yours,” Mordecai readily owned.

“You, then, are a believer?” asked Ephraim, as if really curious, and at the same time anxious to avoid facing the same question.

“I must be . . . since I am converted,” answered each of the others.

“Sensible words,” observed Ephraim, after a thoughtful pause. “To believe is to observe the forms of worship. In men’s eyes, as in those of God himself, the ceremonies of the cult class one as a believer, and society first, Heaven later, will show approval by favours.”

"As far as men are concerned, it is not difficult to satisfy them," spoke Mordecai. "You go to the temple at prescribed times, you perform the rites scrupulously, with proper manifestations of zeal. And this, I dare say, is equally satisfactory to the God."

"Certainly," said Ephraim. "But He is Jesus, son of Joseph, a Jewish God still, and sent by Jehovah, as is proved by His success. He must be a jealous God. Cleverness is necessary, and in my conferences with Him, when we are alone——"

"That is it! That is it!" exclaimed the other two.

"Brother," said Samuel, "what was it that led to your—conversion?"

"It came about very naturally," replied Ephraim, "the reason for it being the great, the only motive of men's actions: self-interest. Self-interest, which it is the fashion among Christians to decry in words, while adhering to it strictly in action. When it became plain to me that the sons of Jehovah, to whom the earth was promised, were not masters of the earth, the holy promises notwithstanding, doubts entered my mind, which were only augmented by reflection. If Jehovah does not keep His promises, thought I, what right has He to the fidelity of those whom He leaves unrewarded? Give and receive is the rule. If I receive nothing, God himself has no claim to anything from me. On the

other hand, I observed that the followers of Jesus possessed the earth, conquered treasures which they reserved strictly for themselves, being forever anxious to proclaim their indifference to worldly goods while inordinately preoccupied with collecting them. Their success seemed to me a sign. And when, after having burned, tortured, and in a thousand ways persecuted us during the dark ages, I saw them inaugurating the reign of justice and liberty by a return to persecution, I saw that the hour had come. I could not, however, decide immediately. A foolish self-respect held me back, I blush to own it. But then the head of the commercial house in which I am employed, doing justice to my talents, said to me:

“‘What a pity that you are a Jew, Ephraim. I would gladly turn over my business to you, but all our customers would forsake us.’

“‘If that is all that stands in the way, I am a Christian.’

“‘A Christian?’

“‘Yes.’

“And, the day after, I was a Christian.” Six months later I married his daughter. My signature is honoured at the bank and at the church. I am president of the Anti-semitic Committee of my district.”

“That is going somewhat far,” remarked Samuel.

“Jews who remain Jews are inexcusable!” said

Ephraim, in irritation against his people. "What is asked of them? A little salt water on their heads. A great matter! Is there any question of denying Jehovah? None, for it is our God whom, by our holy book, we have imposed upon the Gallic barbarians. In all the temples it is Jehovah they worship. Why should we refuse to enter? Whose effigies are they, if you please, on the altars, in the niches? Those of Jews. All Jews! Peter, the first pope—nothing less!—Paul, Joseph, Simon, Thomas, all the apostles. Even to the Jewess Mary and her mother Anna, who are regularly worshipped and who obtain favours from their son and grandson, Jesus, who Himself proclaimed that He had come to fulfill the law of Moses. Now there is not and there cannot be any other law than to vanquish one's rivals, and the victory of Christ is manifestly the victory of Jehovah himself. Christianity is the finest flower of Israel. It is the most flourishing among the Jewish sects, and in it nothing is changed but certain words. Shall we for the sake of a word or two forego that which makes life on earth beautiful? The Jews will come to understand this, and if they delay much longer the anti-semites will make them understand it."

The other two were silent in admiration.

"I suppose, brother," said Samuel after a time to Mordecai, "that your story is practically the same."

"Not at all," replied Mordecai, curtly. "My

case is wholly different. I was rich from birth. My ancestors, a beggarly lot, I admit, had by filing away at Christian coins made Jewish ingots, which I found in my inheritance, and was able to increase considerably by analogous methods. Hence, the idea could never have occurred to me to be—converted—for the sake of gain.” (This shaft was accompanied by a sidelong glance at Ephraim, who did not flinch.) “I lived in peaceful enjoyment of the things money can give, and it can give almost everything, as you know. Sovereigns loved me. I entertained them in my various dwellings. They pushed friendliness to the point of borrowing money from me which they forgot to return. I had the friendship besides of all those aristocracies that draw near at the sound of clinking coin, as serpents do at the sound of the charmer’s flute. Good priests came to my antechamber on begging missions for the restoration or completion of their cathedrals.”

“I fail to see what more you could want,” said Samuel.

“I wanted nothing. You have said it, brother. Count Mordecai of Brussels was the equal of earth’s kings. More princes applied for the hand of my daughters than I had time to refuse.”

“Well?”

“Well, Jehovah, or Christ, or both, placed an extinguisher over this too bright happiness of mine.”

“You are ruined?”

“Oh, no, on the the contrary. Only, the wind changed. To divert the attention of the crowd from a demagogue who shouted, ‘Clericalism is the great enemy!’ the Jesuits devised the plan of raising a cry in opposition: ‘The great enemy is Semitism!’ And as the Jesuits had the whole Church behind them, and the demagogue controlled nothing but a fluctuating crowd, a very feather in the wind, anti-semitism prospered. Thereupon arose from somewhere or other certain so-called “intellectuals,” who defended us in the name of their “ideas.” What clumsy nonsense! And they could not be hushed up. They being our defenders, others for that very reason attacked us. Whereas, had we, according to our traditions, offered our backs to their blows, our enemies would presently have desisted, from weariness. Now the harm is done. We are contemned. No more priests after that sat on my benches. My noble friends deserted my drawing rooms, leaving their unpaid notes in my pocketbook. I went hunting with no company but the two hundred gamekeepers for the battue. Society forsook me. I was no longer “esteemed.” Now, let me declare to you that there is no more exquisite torture than to see the friendship of the great go up in smoke. Unhesitatingly, therefore, resolutely, with the object of reinstating myself in public favour, I turned Christian. It means nothing, as Ephraim here demonstrated. My Christian friends came back,

with contribution boxes outstretched, just as in earlier days. My generosity has ceased to be obnoxious. Now, as before, I build churches. So there is nothing really new in my estate. When I shall have received some honorary employment from the Vatican there will be nothing left to wish for. I have all that is needed for winning in the game. As it is wise, however, to neglect no detail, I thought that the intervention of the Master——”

He indicated the Crucified. But Samuel gave him no time to finish.

“Brothers,” he cried, “I pity you! Conversion in itself means nothing, I agree. It is none the less true that there are traditions worthy of respect, which one must not renounce without serious reasons. A base money lust guided you, Ephraim. And you, Mordecai, were moved by love of the approbation of the majority. Which shows that man is never satisfied on earth. One for material advantages, the other for a thing as illusory as imprisoning the wind, you have sacrificed the ideal by which alone humanity is strong——”

“But you?” cried the others. “Why were you converted?”

“Because of opinion. I came here even now to seek fuller light from——”

“What? What is that you say? Say it over again!”

“I have changed my religion simply because my convictions have changed.”

At these words Ephraim and Mordecai were unable to contain themselves. Leaning for support against the stone pile, they burst into laughter so wild, so loud, at the madness of the statement, that the neighbouring windows shook. They uttered guttural cries, they tossed into the affrighted air grunts of raucous merriment, before the unheard-of monstrosity of the case. There were Ohs and Ahs and Hoo-hoos and Hee-hees, interrupted by fits of coughing brought on by strangling laughter. Then of a sudden, reflection, following upon amusement, turned into fury.

"Villain! Are you making fools of us? Perhaps you think us such simpletons as to swallow your lie. Dog! Reprobate! Accursed! Bad Jew! Raca! Raca! Take that for your belief, your convictions!"

And they fell to beating him.

"What's the matter?" cried the watchman, arriving on the scene, attracted by the noise. "You, over there! Stop pommeling one another, or you will go to jail. Move on! Move on!"

In less time than it takes to tell it, the three men had quieted down. They separated hastily, without good-night, and each with nimble foot went home to bed.

The fourth Israelite, Jesus, son of Joseph, was left alone beneath the stars. He is still there. Without disrespect, I blame Him for not having on this occasion put in a word.

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EVIL BENEFICENCE

VIII

EVIL BENEFICENCE

BENEFICENCE is a virtue: no one will deny it. But let no one deny, either, that there are benefactors maleficent in the extreme, through the stupidity of their benefactions.

In the distant days of my youth there flourished in the Woodland of the Vendée a highly respected couple, who during a period of fifty years wearied three cantons with their "kindness."

These excellent people were, of course, possessed of great wealth, for in order to pester one's fellow-man with generosity one must have received the means for it from heaven. They were, on top of that, pious, again as a matter of course, for the preacher's promise of eternal reward has killed in man the beautiful disinterestedness that is the fine flower of charity.

The Baron de Grillères was a small noble of large fortune. Formerly a member of the body guard of Charles X, he had little care for "Divine Right" or a return to the splendours of the old régime, as he proved by accepting a captaincy in the militia called out by Louis Philippe to crush the royalist attempt at an

uprising in the Vendée, in which the Duchesse de Berry so miserably failed. I have seen in the Baron's study a shining panoply in which his epaulettes of a royal guardsman eloquently fraternized with his collar piece of a captain of the National Guard in arms against the King. In the centre were two crossed swords, one of them formerly worn in the service of the legitimate sovereign anointed at Rheims, the other drawn from its scabbard against that same legitimacy, to uphold the rights of the usurper.

It is certain that the excellent soldier had never perceived anything contradictory in these two manifestations of a martial spirit. He had consistently upheld established order, that is to say, the régime which assured him the peaceful enjoyment of his property, and the logic of his conduct seemed to him unquestionable, for what in the world could be more sacred than that which promoted the quietness of his life? Totally uneducated, barely able to write his name, he was never troubled by any longings after learning. The Church answered for everything; he referred everything to the Church. This principle has the great advantage of dispensing one from any effort to think for himself.

The Baroness, of middle-class origin, and doubtless for that reason very proud of the three gates on her escutcheon, lived solely, as she was pleased to say, "for the glory of God." Divinity, according to this

simple soul, needed the Baroness de Grillères in order to attain the fullness of glory. It is a common idea among believers that the Creator of the Universe is open to receiving from His creatures pleasant or unpleasant impressions, just as we are from our fellow-beings. These estimable people are convinced that the Good Lord of All is pleased or angered accordingly as they act thus or so. They hold Providence in such small esteem as to believe that It needs defending by those same human beings whom It could with a gesture reduce to the original dust. Do we not often hear it said that such and such a minister or party is bent on "driving out God" from somewhere or other, and that they would in all likelihood succeed but for some paladin, ecclesiastical or military, stepping in to defend the Supreme Being, unequal, apparently, to defending Himself? This Baroness of the Vendée, dwelling in perpetual colloquy with the Eternal, either directly or through the mediation of the divine functionaries delegated for that purpose, had taken as her special mission to "contribute to the Glory of God." In some nebulous way it seemed to her that if she gave an example of all the virtues, the Sovereign Artificer, like Vaucanson, delighted with himself on account of his famous mechanical duck, would be puffed up with pride at His success in producing so perfect a human specimen, and that the admiration of the world for the genius capable of such a masterpiece would

deliciously tickle the conceit of the Almighty. One might attribute to the Master of the Infinite less human causes of satisfaction. But, might one say, what matter, if this rather earthly view of Divinity incited the devout Baroness to the practice of the virtues?

"The virtues," when one has an income of 80,000 francs, and no personal tastes, no passion of mind or heart to satisfy, do not seem beyond human reach. For "the glory of God" the Baroness de Grillères was in life as chaste as an iceberg, and at death bequeathed her wealth to the rich.

God, the Holy Virgin, and the Saints bid us to give. More especially, they are pleased if we give first of all to the Church. Chapels sprang up in the Baroness's footprints. After a consultation with her spiritual adviser, she had dedicated her husband to Saint Joseph. The Saint and the Baron exchanged a thousand amenities. The one received statues and prayers, the other, the highest example of resignation. Wherever two avenues crossed in the park, stood a group of the Holy Family, with an inscription showing that the Baron and Baroness de Grillères aspired to linking their names in the public memory with those of the pair conspicuous for the greatest miracle known on earth.

Upon every religious establishment in the surrounding country successively were bestowed sums of money, in exchange for which the pious donors

desired nothing but a marble tablet, placed well in view, whereon was published in golden letters that Christian charity in connection with which the Master has said that the right hand must not know what is done by the left. Of course, the presence of the poor, the sick, and the infirm, in an institution conducted by some congregation, did not actually constitute a reason in the minds of the Baron and Baroness for withholding their gifts. They considered, however, that direct service to God and the Saints must be given precedence, for the heavenly powers were the ones who dispensed rewards; it might, moreover, be feared that there was a sort of impiety in thwarting the unfathomable designs of Providence, by attempting to alleviate the trials It had seen fit to impose upon human beings.

When the mayor of La Fougeraie, a notorious Free Mason, headed a subscription for setting up a public fountain in the village square, the lord and lady of the château refused to contribute, but immediately devoted 2,000 francs to purchasing a holy water font of Carrara marble, on which might be seen a flight of angels carrying heavenward the escutcheon with the three gates.

As for the poor who did not shrink from personally soliciting alms, the Baron and Baroness alike held them in profound contempt. In the history of every wretched beggar there invariably turned out to be some fault in conduct making him unworthy of

charity. One of them had got drunk last Sunday at the tavern, one was accused of stealing potatoes, another had been mixed up in a brawl at the village festival. How could disorderly living of this sort lead to anything but mendicancy? "You ought to go to work, my good man," they would say. "Look for employment. Do you so much as go to mass? Do you keep Lent? Go and see the *curé*. It is to him we give our alms, for the whole countryside knows we keep nothing for ourselves of what the Good God has given us. It is not to the deceitful riches of this earth that we must cling, my poor friend; for heavenly things only must we strive. Go and see the *curé*, he is so kind. He will know how to minister to the needs of your soul."

Sometimes the gift of a little brass medal with the image of Saint Joseph or the Virgin Mary would accompany this homily, and the beggar, however hardened in his evil ways, would depart with humble salutations and a melancholy thankfulness.

It is true that vice deserves hate, but can it be denied that certain aspects of virtue are utterly hateful? Vice, not unlikely to bring about humility and repentance, is sometimes capable of generous actions without hope of reward. The selfish goodness of calculating virtue sees in Christian charity the opening of a bank account with the Creator, and while making lavish gifts, forfeits the merit of giving, by the avowed exaction of a profit immeasurably

greater than the amount paid. The Baron and Baroness de Grillères basked in the delight of hearing themselves praised from the pulpit. No flattering hyperbole seemed to them excessive, for, as they sowed money on all sides, they looked for a great harvest of splendidly ostentatious veneration. All they lacked in order to be loved was that they should first love a little.

Of family life they never knew anything but the companionship of two egoisms, both fiercely straining toward an incomprehensible future felicity, to be earned by the application of a language of love, in which was wrapped their lust of eternity. They had for incidental diversion the base adulation of poor relations, whose mean calculations did not, however, escape them. But the habit of hearing, at every step, every conceivable virtue attributed to them, was an agreeable one, and although they knew that money counted for something in the outpouring of eulogistic superlatives of which they were the objects, they lent themselves easily to the sweet belief that they did, in fact, achieve prodigies of kindness every hour of their lives. No need to say that they never made a gift of three shirts or a pair of shoes to a grand nephew without the fact being trumpeted abroad.

A delightful game, for the Baroness, was distributing legacies among her relatives. Not a piece of furniture, of jewellery, or of silver, did she possess, not a single object of commonest use, that she had not in

theory and in anticipation given to some one of her heirs. She would open a wardrobe and show the happy prospective owner a label posted on the inside of the door: "I bequeathe this piece of furniture, which came to me from my dear Mamma, to my good little cousin Mary, whom I love with all my heart." Picture the embraces, the ensuing effusions of tenderness! Further on, the corner of a bit of paper would stick out from under the pedestal of a clock. "I bequeathe this clock, which was the property of my beloved Grandmother, to my grandnephew, Charles, who will pray for his good aunt." With what ecstasy little grandnephew Charles, led with much mystery to the spot, would with his own eyes read the text naming him possessor of the treasure! No member of the family was without his allotted share.

Only, the capricious Baroness, whom it was very easy to annoy, was perpetually taking offence. For a delayed letter, for thanks which seemed insufficient tribute to her generosity, she would declare that Mary or Charles no longer loved her, and as she looked upon affection merely as a marketable commodity, the little slips of paper referring to heirship were immediately replaced by others. Mary's wardrobe would fall to Selina. Charles's clock would leap into John's inheritance, who would be apprised of the fact in deep secret, until presently, for some unconscious fault, the clock would be temporarily

bestowed upon Alphonse, and the wardrobe upon Rose. Variable book-keeping, which kindled among relatives inextinguishable hatreds. But the Baroness' masterpiece was the marriage between John and Rose.

John was an overseer of highway and bridge construction. He loved his cousin Mary, who contributed by her needlework to the slender family earnings. The young people had been betrothed six months, when one fine day, without any known reason, the Baroness declared that Rose was the one for John, and John exactly suited to Rose. Great commotion. The fear of being disinherited kept every one concerned in subjection to the "dearly beloved Aunt." Mary, desperately weeping, was preached into promising to enter a convent, the Baroness paying her dowry; this for the dear sake of John, whose name she might unite in her prayers with that of the Providential Aunt, who mercifully opened the way of salvation to her. John, alas, was more easily persuaded than she, when he learned that he and Rose together would be chief heirs; and Rose, who had ideas of grandeur, and dreamt of nothing less than going on to the stage, lent herself with her whole heart to the comedy of love fatly remunerative. John was invited to give up his work and "live like a gentleman," and Rose's natural tendencies coöperating, the young couple, loaded down with gifts of sounding specie, spread themselves gloriously, under

the happy eyes of the Baroness, in every description of silly extravagance.

The Baron died of an attack of gout, a disease unknown to clodhoppers. His wealth passed to his wife. Rose and John had received on their marriage an income of only 10,000 francs, but they had the formal promise of the entire inheritance. Unfortunately, a week before her death, the Baroness was shocked by "a lack of regard" on Rose's part, which consisted in not having evinced a sufficiently vociferous despair at the recital of her Aunt's sufferings! By a will made in her last moments everything was bequeathed to the Church, in payment for numberless ceremonies whereby the utmost of celestial bliss was to be secured for the dying woman.

Rose and John, after a torrent of invectives, left that part of the country. An income of 10,000 francs signified poverty for them. They fled to Paris, where in less than a year John lost down to his last penny in speculations. After that they went their respective ways, Rose to sing in a café-concert of the Faubourg St. Martin, John to take employment with a booking agency for the races. He has as yet only been sentenced to one month's imprisonment for a swindling card-game.

Admirable results of an Evil Beneficence!

A MAD THINKER

IX

A MAD THINKER

AMONG the wise, some will perhaps agree with me, the maddest madmen are not those who are commonly called so. In great walled and barred and guarded buildings—prisons where people who are condemned by “science,” just as elsewhere people are condemned by “law,” expiate the crime of a psychological disorder greater than that of the majority—unfortunate beings are kept behind bolts and triple locks, for the incoherence of their syllogisms, while fellow mortals no more mentally stable are allowed to do their raving out on the world’s stage.

For one whole year in my youth I dwelt among the lunatics of Bicêtre. I had many interviews with “impulsives,” whom a sudden disturbance of the organism had made dangerously violent, and who talked pathetically about their “illness,” believing it cured, whereas it was not. I held discussions with patients suffering from more or less specific delusions. From those now long-past associations I have retained a habit of comparing the mentalities inside asylums with those outside, which proceeding leads

rather to the proposal than the solution of problems.

What seems clear, however, is that we have not discovered a standard of good sense, a way of measuring reason, by which we could definitely separate sane from morbid psychology; that, furthermore, such a method, had we discovered it, would not help us much, considering the disconcerting ease with which men pass from the normal to the pathological state, and vice versa. We should need too many asylums, and there would be too continual a coming and going in and out of them. We should not have time, between sojourns there, to study what we wanted to learn, to teach what we knew, to prove to each other that we are all afloat in a sea of errors, to quarrel, to vote, to kill one another, and to reproduce ourselves for the sake of perpetuating the balance of unbalance amid which fate has placed us.

Let us then accept the human phenomenon as it stands, and beware of classifications which might lead us to believe that the mere fact of being at liberty on the public highways is a guarantee of sound mind. Whoever doubts this may wisely consider the judgments men are pleased to pass upon one another. Question the Christian with regard to the atheist, he will tell you that one must be totally devoid of common sense to deny evidence that to him seems conclusive. The Mahomedan will not

conceal from you, if you discuss Christianity with him, that one must unmistakably be mad, to identify three in one, and believe in a physical manifestation of God to man. The Buddhist will look upon the Mussulman as feeble in reasoning power, and the practiser of fetishism on the coast of Africa or of Australasia will declare all these sects foolish, since to him the only rational thing is to worship his fetishes, which are, strangely enough, matched in our religion by the many miraculous statues. Lastly, let me mention the philosophers, who agree in regarding all those people as affected with morbid degeneration, while pitying one another because of the mutual imputation of diseased understanding.

At the time when I, like so many others, was seeking for the absolute truth which should give me the key to all knowledge, I made the acquaintance of one of those same seekers, possibly mad, or possibly gifted with more than ordinary intelligence, who applied all his mental energy to the solution of the problem of the construction of the world, and to answering the questions raised by the presence of man on earth. He was one of those "unfrocksed priests" whom people usually blame because they refuse to preach what seems to them a lie. I do not give his name, his express desire having been to pass unknown among men. He left the priesthood quietly, and after a fairly long stay in Paris, during which he studied medicine, returned to his native

village, where two small farms brought him an income more than sufficient for his needs.

He lived alone, despised by pious relatives, who besieged him with flattering attentions aimed at his inheritance, but were kept at a respectful distance by his witty and well-directed shafts of sarcasm. A veritable Doctor Faustus. Fifty years he spent in assiduous study of the great minds that make up the history of human thought. His door was open to the poor, but he did not seek them out, absorbed as he was in problems allowing him neither diversion nor respite. He had no curiosity as to what was going on in the world. His spirit lived in the perpetual tension of reaching out toward the unknown, feverishly importuned to deliver up its mystery, and he did not wish to know anything of men, their conflicts, their often contradictory efforts to better their fate. Had he lived in the midst of the Siberian steppes, or on some Malay Island, he would not have been more entirely cut off from the surrounding social life. The Franco-Prussian war and the Commune were as remote from him in the depths of the Vendée as Alexander's expedition to the Indies. When one of the farmers once tried to recall that period to his mind: "Yes, yes, I remember," he answered, "all the fruit was frozen that year." It was the only vestige in his memory of those terrific storms.

He was naturally considered mad, but it could not be denied that he reasoned pertinently on all sub-

jects. Absorbed in books, he had for sole company the men of all time, and felt himself far better acquainted with Leucippus, Democritus, Epicurus, Newton, Laplace, Darwin, and Auguste Comte than with Bismarck or General Trochu. Shut up day and night in a great room to which no one had admittance, he lived over with delight the vast poem of the creation of the world. In waking to consciousness, the universe, he was wont to say, had set us a riddle, after the manner of the Sphinx, and he, a new Oedipus, was challenging the monster. He would tear out its secret, he would proclaim it from the earth to the stars, while disdaining the glory dear to ordinary mortals. For he had taken every precaution to ensure the author's name remaining absolutely unknown when his great work should be published. In order to avert suspicion, the book was first to be printed in a foreign tongue.

If the Abbé was mad—the peasants still called him by his ecclesiastical title, either from old habit, or respect for his mysterious investigations—his madness was certainly not a mania for self-aggrandizement. Disinterested truth, truth with no other reward than success in the effort to reach it, was the single impulse moving this monkishly cloistered existence. One might say that there was proof of an unbalanced mind. I will not argue the point. Absolute truth is undoubtedly beyond our reach. It is none the less true that the sustained effort to

attain truth remains the noblest distinction of man. If it is reasonable to desire to know, who shall say at what point it becomes folly, through aspiration outstripping the possibility of satisfaction? Since, furthermore, this possibility increases with the progressive evolution of the mind, might not it follow that one who had been thought mad, in olden days, would be called wise to-day and that the madman of to-day will in future ages be a prodigy of luminous intellect? Find the boundary line between reason and unreason in this inextricable tangle!

But to return to our excellent "Abbé," with whom, by a curious chance, I became intimately acquainted, a few months before his death, I must say that he never troubled himself with these considerations, to him inane. He did not deny that there were maladies of the mind, but he professed complete scorn for the "collection of low prejudices" to which the name of "reason" was given by the general public. "I have come too soon," he said to me. "In a few thousand years they will erect statues to the man who will be a repetition of me. So far, men have parted at the cross-roads where the paths of science and faith diverge. Some day there will be one broad highroad to knowledge. The time has not come to lay that road. As barbarism covered over the premature flowering of Greek thought, so our present savagery would soon crowd out truths too newly ar-

rived at, which only very gradually will take root in men's minds."

"Tell me," I said to him one day, "since you stand on such a height that you are free from the pride of the precursor, that you are insensible to human glory, that you do not even intend to leave to posterity your name as a seeker, have you never, alone with your conscience, and stripped of all personal interest, asked yourself whether you were sure, after all, entirely sure, of possessing this total and absolute truth?"

The Abbé's little gray eyes twinkled. He answered with a melancholy smile: "The final and irreparable failure of my religious faith was a fearful blow to me. I no longer believed. What had appeared to me good evidence on the day before looked to me from that day onward like the irrational wanderings of delirium. But I realize to-day, after so many years of meditation, that although my old conceptions of existence could not stand the test of experience, yet the framework of my mind has remained the same. I had abandoned the Theological Absolute; I was in search of a Scientific Absolute, no more to be found than the other. I do not regret my error, for I owe to it the greatest joys of my life. For thirty years the marvel of seeing the veil of Isis slowly raised, and the world, bit by bit, taken to pieces and put together again, according to infallible laws, brought me the supreme delight of grasping

the world by thought. When I had exhausted analysis and synthesis, I undertook to tell my discoveries, and such was my mastery of my subject that in ten years I wrote a volume of five hundred pages, in which, I can say it now, for I have burned it, was contained what, in incalculable centuries to come, will be considered the treasure of human knowledge."

"You burned this work of yours?"

"Yes, to replace it by another."

"And is this other one final?"

"You want my complete confession? I am so near death that I will afford you this pleasure. Having finished my book, I decided to devote the rest of my life to going over it, pen in hand, and annotating it. Alas! When I became my own critic I found the fine frenzy of creation replaced by a power of keenly reasoning destructiveness which I had up to that time not suspected in myself. The creators of systems in the past were only gifted with the power of induction and prophecy. I had the power to dissect, to undermine my own inductions and prophecies. What we term truth is but an elimination of errors. I thought, I still think, that I had attained truth, pure and simple, but the edifice so laboriously built could not escape the pitiless criticism of the builder. The same mental gymnastics which had led to my replacing former doubts by demonstrated affirmations now raised fresh doubts in the face of my new demonstrations. What

would have been their effect upon the unprepared intelligences for which the result of my labour was intended? I spent five years of painful spiritual tension in rewriting and condensing my work."

"And this time you were satisfied?"

"No more than before. While I am writing, I am, in spite of myself, possessed by the absolute. I take too vaulting a leap toward truth. Then I realize that men will shrug their shoulders and call me mad, and I question whether it is not in fact madness to try to bring to intelligences of to-day knowledge which belongs to the far future. Furthermore, no matter how strongly I have felt myself fortified on all sides by evidence, a fury of criticism has hurled me to the attack of my fortress of truth. It took two years to reduce my five-hundred-page book to two hundred pages. Four more years of work—and a notebook of perhaps fifty pages is all that is left—the bone and marrow of the whole matter, for my aim has been to eliminate, one by one, every element of possible uncertainty."

"And now there remains no doubt, I suppose?"

"Nay, doubt remains. Is it strength or weakness of mind? I cannot say. If I have time to go on working, nothing will be left of my work, and I shall have made the great journey, from reason that seeks to folly that finds, and from folly that knows to reason which, very wisely, still doubts."

The Abbé died six months later, leaving all he

had to the poor. Besides his will, not a single page of writing was found among his belongings.

The village priest came to see him in his last hour. He spoke to him of God—bade him believe, alleging that science led to doubt—whereas faith——

“Then you yourself are sure, are you?” asked the dying man.

“Certainly—I know with absolute certainty.”

“Reverend sir, I once spoke as you are speaking. Only ignorance is capable of such proud utterances. Grant to a dying man the privilege of delivering this lesson. I who have aspired to know, know that you know no more than I—even less—I dare affirm it. It is really not enough to justify taking up so much room in the sunshine!”

BETTER THAN STEALING

X

BETTER THAN STEALING

THE man from Paris is a natural object of hatred to the poacher. I refer to the hunting man from Paris, who raises game for his own sport in carefully preserved enclosures. This ostentatious personage, who comes and fills the countryside with special guards to keep the aggrieved pedestrian out of glades and plains and bypaths, seems to the rustics a pernicious intruder, in a state of legal warfare against the countryman, who feels himself the friend and legitimate owner of the animals, furry or feathered, with whom his labour in the fields has made him well acquainted. All is fair play against this "maker of trouble." The only thing is not to get "pinched."

Then begins a warfare of ambushes and ruses with the band of gamekeepers, who, having the law on their side, always end by getting the better of those whose only argument of defence is the "natural right" of a man to destroy wild life.

During the season there are almost daily exchanges of shot. Often a man is killed, which means jail, penitentiary, scaffold. All for a miserable rabbit!

Remnants of the feudalism of birth which the effort of revolutions has merely replaced by the feudalism of money.

The worst of it is that gamekeepers and poachers, mutually exasperated, cling to their quarrel, and that a taste for brigandage develops in men diverted from the unremunerative tilling of the soil by the daily temptation of booty. Deal as harshly as you may with the poacher, you will not succeed in discouraging him. Has anything ever cured a devotee of roulette? And to the excitement of gambling, in this case, is added the attraction of danger. There is no cure for it. The question of increasing the penalty for poaching often comes up. There will be long discussion before anything is ever done. The discrepancy would be too great between the misdeed and the punishment. And the matter of elections enters into it. No one is anxious to make too violent enemies among the citizen electors.

Entirely different is the question of poaching in the happy regions—there are not many left in France—where preserved hunting is still at the rhetorical stage. There the poacher is merely a hunter without a permit, and as no such thing exists as a peasant whom a hare has never tempted to use his gun, and as a natural understanding unites all those who are compelled to pay taxes against the State which represents taxation and statute labour, never will you find a field labourer ready to admit that a

shot, in order to be lawful, needs the seal of a tax gatherer.

The poacher on free territory, therefore, does not hide as does the poacher on preserved lands. He plays a sort of tag with the rural guard, who is by no means eager to meet him, and with the occasional *gendarmes*, whose cocked hats and baldricks make them conspicuous from afar. Following along hedges, looking for burrows, keeping his eyes steadfastly on the ground, he scents out the wild creatures and knows the art of capturing them.

How often, in the days of my youth, have I accompanied the redoubtable Janière on his Sunday expeditions, when he would ostensibly leave the village by the highroad, his hands in his pockets, then dash into the fields, and miraculously find his gun hidden in a bush, a few feet from a rabbit hole. Nor man nor beast was ever known to get the better of him. He was an old Chouan of 1815 who, having been a poacher all his days, and a marauder now and then, died without ever having had a writ served on him. The entire district took pride in Janière. When he left us for a better world: "He never once went to prison," said the peasants by way of funeral oration. What that man could deduce from a blade of grass lying over on one side or the other at the edge of a thicket really approached the miraculous. He would consult the wind, the sun, and would construct for me the train of reasoning

which must have brought the hare to the precise spot where we invariably found him. His accommodating gun made no more noise than the cracking of a whip. The victim, hidden in the hollow of a pollard, would at nightfall find its way under Janière's blouse.

But whither have I let myself wander? It was of the water poacher that I meant to speak. He, one might say, is the enemy of no man on earth. Fish, of dubious morals we are assured, find no such personal sympathy among us as do the furry and feathered folk. A carp, gasping on the grass, does not bring tears to our eyes, he seems to belong to a different world, and the police officer at war against illicit fishing, backed up by more or less convincing arguments relating to the restocking of rivers, has no one on his side. For this reason, my compatriot Simon Grelu counted as many friends as there were inhabitants in the canton. The killing of a hare in his lair rouses enmity among the poachers who alike had their eye on him. No quarrel results from a tench landed. Simon Grelu, besides fishing at once for profit and the love of it, gave freely of his catch, whence came the universal good-will accompanying him on his nightly or daily expeditions.

Our river in the Vendée, the Lay, wends its leisurely way amid reeds and waterlilies, sometimes narrowing between rocks covered with broom and furze and oak trees, sometimes widening under over-

arching alders, onward to the meadows, where it attracts the flocks. Everywhere are mills with their gates. It is a populous river, and no one could be said to "populate" it more than Simon Grelu, nominally a miller's assistant, living in the ruin of what was thought to have been a mill at the time of the wars between the Blues and the Whites.

Simon Grelu is a great tall fellow, all legs and arms and joints, with a long neck leading up to a long nose, which gives him the look of a heron. From the Marshland to the Woodland there is no more noted spoiler of rivers; he is celebrated for the constancy of his relations with the police. Hampered by his lengthy appendages, he is perpetually letting himself be caught, and disdaining what will be thought of it. Every angle of every rock, every stump by the water's edge, is so familiar and homelike to him that he cannot bear to leave his river, and rather than make good his escape on land, prefers to have a warrant served on him, secure in the fact that he has nothing wherewith to pay a fine.

When the police sergeant rebukes his men for their laziness, they cry with one accord:

"Let us go and look up Grelu!"

They go, and find him without the least trouble.

That was what happened last week, and owing to it I had the pleasure of witnessing the interview I am about to relate. I was taking a walk with the Mayor, when Simon Grelu suddenly stood before

us. More elongated than ever, with his bony, sallow face, his pointed skull topped by a little tuft of white hair, his mouth open in a smile truly formidable from the threat of a single great black tooth which the slightest cough would inevitably have flung in one's face, the heron-man stood before us, motionless in his wooden shoes.

"I have come for my certificate, *monsieur le maire*," said he with a sort of clucking which might express either mirth or despair.

"What certificate?"

"Why, my certificate of mendicancy, as usual, when I am caught."

"What! Again? Is there no end to it?"

"It is better than stealing, isn't it, *monsieur le maire*?"

"But you have not the choice between poaching and stealing only, Simon. You could work."

"And do you suppose I don't work? Many thanks! Who drudges more than I do? The whole night in the water! Those accursed policemen played a trick on me!"

"They caught you?"

"That's nothing. They made a fool of me, *monsieur le maire*. No, it can't be called anything else. I shall never forgive myself for being made a fool of——"

"What happened?"

"What happened is that those policemen laughed

at me all the way up and down the river. They were half a mile away, and I could still hear them roaring with laughter. No, I never knew I was such a dunderhead."

"But, come to the point, what did they do to you?"

"Ah—the villains! Imagine, *monsieur le maire*, it was just before daylight, and I was quietly fishing below the mill of La Rochette. The idea, anyway, of forbidding fishing before sunrise! Is it my fault if fishes come out to play at night?"

"Well—what happened?"

"I was in my boat——"

"You have a boat, then?"

"No, *monsieur le maire*, I may as well tell you, for you'll know it to-morrow, anyway, that it was your boat, which I had taken from your dike by the big pasture."

"And where did you get the key?"

"Ah—you know—with a nail—and there is no chain—— But I shut everything up again without damaging the lock. I should not like to give you any trouble. I washed the boat, too, where the fish had left it muddy."

"You had caught a great deal of fish?"

"No. Ten pounds, perhaps. I had only just begun."

"I never caught that much fish in my life. How do you do it?"

“Oh—they know me. As I was telling you, I was in my—in your boat, when I heard those d—— policemen calling me. ‘Hey! Grelu, come ashore! We are serving your warrant on you!’ Well, I landed, of course. I am used to it. We chatted like friends. They carried away my fish to fry for themselves. You won’t tell me there is any justice in that, will you, *monsieur le maire?*”

“Is that the trick they played on you?”

“Oh, no! When the police had gone, I said to myself: ‘Now I’m fined, I may as well go on fishing. I shan’t be able to pay the fine, whether I do or not. So I’ll stay.’ I fished and I fished. I was doing first rate. I was happy. When, suddenly, I hear voices. The police again! Two warrants in one night! I couldn’t have that! The boat was giving me away. But they might think I had left it there. So I hide in the water, with nothing out but my head, and I wait. What do you think they do? They stretch out on the grass, they light their pipes, and they begin to talk. They had got lost, the idiots! And finding themselves back at the mill, were looking for me to ask their way.

“As for me, I was none too comfortable in the mud. Those loafers wouldn’t go away. When one pipe went out, they lighted another. I saw there was going to be nothing for it but to get caught again. Suddenly one of the men says: ‘Father Grelu,’ says he, ‘you must be cold in there. Come and

warm yourself at my pipe.' I come out, all covered with mud, and I shake my fist at him. 'If you serve another warrant on me——!' says I to him. 'A second warrant?' says he. 'No danger of that. The law prevents it. We can only serve one warrant in twenty-four hours on the same person for the same offence. What! You didn't know that, Grelu? And that is why you stayed in the water? We were just saying: "I wonder why he does that?" Ah, Father Grelu, we are sorry! We thought you knew better.' And they laughed. And they laughed. I was in no mood for laughing. Did you know that, *monsieur le maire*, that two warrants could not be served at once?"

"No."

"Well, I know it for another time, you may be sure. And now, may I have my certificate of mendicancy, which releases me from liability to fine?"

"Very well. Your bath might have given you pneumonia. How old are you?"

"Over seventy. No harm will ever come to me from water."

"Nor from wine, eh? It is funny, all the same, to be giving you a certificate of destitution when I see you so often at the tavern."

"They give me credit, *monsieur le maire*. I pay them in fish. It is better than stealing, anyway."

THE GRAY FOX

XI

THE GRAY FOX

AFTER the poacher the vagabond has the place of honour in the disfavour of the licensed citizen. A man without an abode inscribed in the tax collector's book comes near to being a man without a country, in the eyes of the bourgeois, inclined to regard the land of his fathers as exclusively what one of them has frankly called it, "the native land of the landed proprietor."

It is easy to pronounce against the unfortunate nomad the withering sentence: "He pays no taxes." No taxes, the barefoot tramp who halts on the edge of a ditch to eat his succinct meal? I defy him to spend the penny just tossed him, without the State stepping in between him and his poor bite and taking a portion of it away. How can he be fed, clothed, and warmed without the State making its existence felt by the exaction of a tithe? Merely tithes levied upon beggars would amount to a considerable revenue. The beggar takes no pride in this fact, being carelessly ungrudging of the sacrifices demanded by public duty, and this very modesty does him wrong, for under the pretext that he is of no social

utility, householders, under-prefects, army corps commanders, and directors of the Bank of France, all unite in imputing to him most of the evils from which they are supposed to protect us.

In country places, the blame for whatever happens falls on the vagabonds. Theft, arson, trespassing, who could be guilty of these offences, if not the homeless wanderers going over the roads afoot, when all self-respecting men have at least the use of an automobile? What trade can they ply but taking other people's belongings, seeing that they have nothing of their own? Hence the execration of those who have belongings. I once knew an old philosopher who maintained that it was better to throw bread than stones at them. Ordinarily stones are readier to hand. When there are enough of them, the tramp gathers them into a pile at the roadside and breaks them for honest wages. Never for a moment believe that any one, from the President of the Republic down to the road mender, will express the slightest gratitude to him. Like Timon of Athens, he expects nothing from human kind.

And yet, his defence, should he take the trouble to make one, would not be lacking in interest. Lost sentinel of the army of labour, he might relate strange adventures in the industrial warfare, no less cruel than the other warfare. He might find it difficult to deny a share of shortcomings on his side—but what of the consciences of “the

righteous," oftentimes, if one could see them in nakedness?

Humanity means weakness. If the vagabond can own as much for himself, he can bear witness to the same in the case of others. Oftener, perhaps, than is generally believed, for peasants, like city people, are tempted by their neighbours' property, and as the caught thief always accuses some unknown personage of the crime attributed to him, the vagabond is in all countries the easy expiatory victim of "the respectable."

Something of the kind happened in the affair of the "Gray Fox," which once upon a time set my village in uproar. At that distant date one of the notables of the hamlet, a locksmith by trade, who had "inherited property," was Claude Guillorit. Without vanity in his Roman Emperor's name, he carried it with the quiet dignity of a man whose future is assured. He was a "scholar," incredibly learned in the accumulation of miscellaneous facts which almanacs spread even in the remotest districts. He quoted proverbs, was full of strange saws, foretold the future—approximately. He was to be met with by night, carrying a large basket, in search of simples, which have special virtues when gathered after sundown. He brewed philters for the benefit of man and beast, and cured fevers, I must admit, more easily than he did locks.

For, in spite of his explicit locksmith's sign, locks

were wrapped in mystery for Claudit—so called “for short.” Village housewives, whose furniture knows not intricate locks, are at the end of their resources when they have cleaned the rust off their keys, or smeared a creaky lock with oil. If the evil persisted, in those days, the cry of supreme distress used to be: “Go and get Claudit,” even as Napoleon’s cry was: “Send forward the guard!” when he was at the end of his genius.

Accompanied by a formidable clatter of ironware, a little slim, spare, sharp man would approach, with long gray locks swinging about his face, after straggling from under a black round of which no one could have declared with any certainty whether it had been a hat or a cap at the time of the Revolution. But it was not his headgear that held the eye. What struck one, what fixed the attention, what filled even a person unacquainted with him with a sort of superstitious uneasiness, was the black dart of two small, lustreless eyes, which entered one’s very soul and stuck there. When the shaft of Claudit’s glance had pierced one, it was not to be plucked from the memory. The man, however, did not concern himself with the impression he produced; he never broke the silence except from necessity, and then spoke only of things pertaining to lock mending.

When he had arrived before the recalcitrant lock, he would throw on the ground—together with the great basket from which he was never separated,

and which no one ever saw open except on one memorable occasion—an iron hoop, whence hung an extraordinary number of queerly wrought and bent hooks; then he would kneel down as if in prayer, and apply his eye to the keyhole. After a moment of scientific examination:

“*Pardine !*” he would cry—it was his favourite oath—“I see nothing at all.”

In which there was nothing surprising. Claudit seemed, none the less, to experience great relief from this first ascertainment. Then followed questions regarding the piece of furniture, what was its history, and the probable age of its lock, then groans over the wretched work done in olden days. And now the moment had come for the diagnosis. Every lock may be afflicted with any one of numerous ailments. Claudit would enumerate them with great erudition, giving his client his choice among the various evils.

“It may be that, or it may be something else. I am no wizard. We shall see.”

Thereupon a storm of hammerblows would beat upon the wood and the iron. The cloudburst over, the key would function no better.

He would have to resort to subtler methods. Unperturbed, Claudit would brandish his hoop with the pendent hooks, and having examined each with care, would select one and insert it very deliberately, with appropriate contortions, into the orifice

where lay the seat of the trouble. Creakings would ensue beyond anything ever heard. Up and down, down and up, from left to right, and right to left, and all around the compass, he would turn and twist and rub the rusty point, would force it to the exhaustion of human strength, and, since the truth must be told, I will confess that I have seen locks which under this violent treatment took the provisional course of behaving themselves. Claudit would exhibit no pride. Such triumphs of his art were not calculated to surprise him.

When the lock seemed to be entirely bedevilled, Claudit would draw from his pocket a two-penny knife, the blade of which had gained a saw-edge from much usage, and for the final satisfaction of conscience would do what he could by "rummaging" with it. After that it was finished.

"The King himself could do no more," he would declare, fully assured that Louis Philippe would have succeeded no better than he. "If you like, I will make you a new lock."

Do not imagine that the manufacture of this lock would give Claudit any great trouble. He sent to Nantes for his locks. He unscrewed one, and screwed on another, and by this simple performance acquired the reputation of a "skilled workman."

A little forge was attached to his house. It was littered with iron junk. But no man alive ever saw it

lighted, so that hens had formed the habit of making their nest amid the cinders of the hearth, and the white gleam of eggs was pleasant to see at the bottom of the crater where one looked for glowing coals. I have seen as many as ten, for Claudit, owing to an extreme love of poultry, permitted large numbers of hens to wander at will about his dwelling.

In reality, the mending of locks and the brewing of healing philters were merely the recreations of his life. Its passion was "the little hen," as he tenderly called her. One of those silent passions deeply rooted in our inmost being, for the satisfaction of which the Evil One besieges us with temptations. It is certain that between Claudit and the gallinaceous tribe obscure affinities existed. On Claudit's side the sentiment might be explained by an appetite for toothsome eating. But why did the hen feel Claudit's fascination? Why did she stand there, stupidly motionless, fastened to the ground by the magnetism of that black eye? They say that hypnotized hens will drop of themselves into the fox's jaws. To quote Hamlet: "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy."

Curious as it may seem, Claudit was not the only one in our village to cultivate a fondness for poultry. From time immemorial housewives on all sides had complained of missing hens. Everyone blamed it on the tramps, who were never there to answer back. Claudit more than any other suffered from these

thefts, and bewailed his losses at every street corner. His white hen gone, his black hen and his yellow hen gone, the thieves were cleaning him out—and the neighbours got Christian consolation in their misfortunes from the reflection that Claudit was even more cruelly hit than they.

Claudit, as may be imagined, was on the lookout for marauders, but in vain. One day he saw one, but was unable to catch up with him. It was a bent old man, dragging along a bag, full of hens, no doubt. "A regular gray fox," muttered the wronged and indignant Claudit.

The name stuck to the unknown. His description was given to the police, and a warning was sent out by the authorities, against the despoiler of farms, and chief of a band of marauders, known under the name of "Gray Fox."

One day Claudit, on his way home from a heated battle with a stubborn lock, was crossing the village, when he stopped at sight of a crowd. An aged tramp, bent double under the weight of a coarse canvas bag, was struggling with the rural guard, who had found him lying asleep beside a ditch and was accusing him of all the vague crimes reported over the whole canton. The women had come running out of their houses, and each of them had some accusation to bring against the malefactor. One in particular was making an outcry:

"My cuckoo hen was stolen this morning. He

took it! Come, now, give me back my hen and go get yourself hanged elsewhere!”

“Ah! So you stole a hen, did you?” exclaimed the rural guard. “I knew there was something wrong.”

Then addressing the crowd: “The bent old man with a bag is the ‘Gray Fox,’ isn’t he? You are the ‘Gray Fox,’ aren’t you? You may as well confess.”

It was here that Claudit arrived upon the scene, by good luck, for having once seen the thief, he could identify him better than any one else. Way was made for him, and the entire village, hanging on his lips, waited to hear what he would say.

“*Pardine!*” said Claudit, scratching his ear, “I believe we’ve got him this time. Yes, yes, I recognize him. He is the ‘Gray Fox.’”

“Hoo—hoo! To prison with the Gray Fox!” howled the delirious crowd.

“Give me back my cuckoo hen!” screamed the housewife.

But the man, not in the least agitated, straightened up and said:

“So I am the Gray Fox, am I? My word! You are too great fools! Often enough, from the other side of a hedge, I have seen him at work, your Gray Fox. I know him. Do you want me to show him to you?”

And with a kick he overturned Claudit’s basket, whence fell the dead body of the much-lamented cuckoo hen.

The entire canton still echoes with this spectacular stroke. With blows and kicks the Gray Fox, the real one, was led back to his lair, and there, in a secret cellar, was discovered a collection of stolen hens, peacefully awaiting their turn to be cooked with accompaniment of cabbage. Everyone recognized his own hen, and everyone hastily seized it. Even Claudit's legitimate hens went by that road. But he was not the man to let himself be despoiled in silence.

"You say these hens are yours!" he cried. "I know nothing about it. I am willing to give them to you. But I shall let nobody steal the hens that belong to me."

And before a week had passed, Claudit had, by the power of speech, got back all his hens, with, it was said, a few of doubtful ownership into the bargain.

To this insistence and its success he owed a return of public esteem. But when a lock thereafter required his attention he was emphatically bidden to leave his basket at home.

THE ADVENTURE OF MY CURÉ

XII

THE ADVENTURE OF MY CURÉ

I HAVE had no very consecutive relations with the *curé* of my village. Many things stand between us. Our age, our occupations, our ideas. He follows one path, I another. Which does not prevent our occasionally meeting out in the country, or at the cross roads. We exchange greetings which vary according to the time of day; we occasionally talk of the weather, as it is, and as it should be to satisfy the peasants. In the crops we find yet another subject for a brief conversation. But we rarely venture beyond this circle of observations. His breviary claims him, and the finger marking the page of his interrupted reading is a delicate hint that the talk had best be brief. I have partridges to deliver, and must not linger, either. There is a slight awkwardness between us, even in saying good-bye. I am anxious not to say anything that may offend the simplicity of his faith, but I always fear one of those somewhat indiscreet suggestions which priests regard as part of their duty. On his side, it is evident that he dreads my so far forgetting myself as to make remarks which will oblige him to

stand on the defensive. I cannot help seeing that I am an incomprehensible enigma to him, whereas his state of mind is not in the least puzzling to me. How can I explain this mystery to him, without cruelly wounding him? We therefore part, after a few conventional words, regretting the necessity to stop short on the verge of a conversation which tempts us both, and aware that we have something to say to each other which we shall never say. To his last day he will undoubtedly regard me as an agent of the Devil. And on my side I can only silently sympathize with his sorrow in the recesses of my mind.

Abbé Mignot is a tall, robust, florid Burgundian, whose muscular frame seems better suited to field labour than to the unctuous gestures of the sacred ministry. The son of a vintner, he had begun life as a plowboy, when an aged singer, who had been a great sinner while she trod the boards of light opera in Paris, returned to her native village, there to acquire spiritual merit by good works, which the remuneration for vice out in the world enabled her to do. She reared altars, and munificently endowed them. She enriched the church with incomparable raiment. The pulpit praised the zeal of the excellent donor, who was earning Heaven by the virtues belonging to old age, and by preaching austerity to others.

One day this saintly lady, in quest of redemption, met at the edge of the village a dishevelled boy who

was subduing the fierceness of a young bullock by the aid of sounding oaths and a shower of blows. The picture seemed to her beautiful, even though the music was profane. She questioned the child, whose precocious adolescence called up distant memories connected with this same muddy, rustic setting, and being suddenly vouchsafed light from on high, she conceived the plan of redeeming her very earliest sin (which had led to so many others), by means of the young bullock driver who seemed to her on the brink of perdition. Providence, and not chance, had set on her path this innocence to be saved from imminent peril. What an admirable priest the youth would make, when properly scrubbed, with his great clear eyes, his blond curls, his laughing insolence of a conquering hero! So the sinner who had turned away so many souls from the path to Heaven would redeem the past forever by leaving behind her an authentic servant of God, to keep up the necessary expiatory work after her death.

All would have been well had not the vintner hung mightily back. His son had cost him "a lot of money." He was just about to "bring him in something" now. This was not the time for sending him away.

"If he goes," he said, "I shall have to hire a servant. . . . That costs a great deal, counting his food. I can't afford it."

But the more obdurate the peasant was, the more

obstinate became the devout lady in her resolve to accomplish the duty laid upon her by Heaven, as she declared. Negotiations were difficult, for Father Mignot had no liking for "skullcaps," as he called priests, and a double argument had to be used: one bag of money to repay him for his "pecuniary loss," and a second bag to allay the scruples of anticlericalism, aggravated by the circumstances. And this is what was called "The vocation of Arsène Mignot."

More than twenty years later, Abbé Mignot came to us with the remnants of his family: a widowed sister and three nephews without means of support. As I am telling nothing but what is strictly true, I have to admit that he met with a chilly reception. The old *curé*, whom we had just lost, had had enough to do to guard his eighty years from the heat and the cold, and to quaver out his masses. Our peasants are not fond of being too closely questioned. When they saw this new man, still under forty, carrying his need for action into their very houses, breaking, from one day to the next, the happy-go-lucky traditions which had made his predecessor popular, they silently assumed the attitude of self-defence. But the *curé*, being a peasant, knew his peasants. When he discovered his mistake, he had the sense to change his course, and to win back the discontented, one by one, without noise or waste of words.

And so, our village would have had no story, but

for a hospital belonging to it, and standing in a hamlet two miles away. This hospital, privately endowed, was tended by four nuns of I know not what order. Disease, however, never marred the spot by its presence. Against the express wish of the founder, a school had been established in it, and any sick person coming to ask admission was told that his presence would be dangerous to the school children, upon which he obediently went to die elsewhere. Two elderly spinsters, who did the work of servants, figured in the Sisters' conversation as "our incurables." By this means they were entitled to retain the inscription on the wall, announcing that hospital care might there be obtained.

Concerning the Sisters themselves there is nothing to say. They taught the catechism, sang off the key at mass, and made a great show of zeal toward the one they called "Mother." Their chief entertainment was luncheon at the *curé's* on Sunday after church. A sweet dish and a little glass of Chartreuse crowned this extravagance. Then there would be much puerile chatter on topics drawn chiefly from the *Religious Weekly*. New recruits were proudly enumerated, eyes were rolled heavenward at talk of "apostates," and the latest miracles were related in minutest detail. A touch of politics occasionally spiced the heroic resolution to brave martyrdom. At parting, all were in a state of edification.

The trouble was that Abbé Mignot, without in-

come, had four mouths to feed. The cost of the luncheon could not be brought within the limits of his budget. He made a frank confession of this to the "Mother," who answered haughtily that privation was the luxury of her estate, and that the Sisters would uncomplainingly return to sharing the "bread of the sick," at the hospital. Her words came true, for the very next week there was a patient at the hospital: the "Mother" herself, whom an attack of erysipelas carried off in three days. The school had to be dismissed and everything scientifically disinfected, before the scholars could return. This duty fell upon the new Mother, a charming young nun, whose beautiful eyes, gentle speech, and affable manners, created a sensation in the countryside.

Mother Rosalie was gifted with a beautiful soprano voice, which proved to be a source of divine refreshment to Abbé Mignot, who was fond of playing the organ. There can be no music without work. Work at their music threw the Mother and the *curé* together. And as one study leads to another, the visits of Mother Rosalie to Abbé Mignot came to be fairly frequent. Presently there was gossip, and after a time what had at first been a playful buzzing became rumblings of scandal. Is it credible? The first threat of a storm came from the three Sisters at the hospital. These old maids, who had until that moment been totally insignificant,

felt surging in them, of a sudden, an irrepressible wave of spleen, intensified and again intensified by the acid of celibacy. Although touched in a sensitive spot by the discontinuance of luncheon at the rectory on Sundays, sole amusement of their lives, they had made no sign. But the moment their one-time host laid himself open to criticism, the hurricane burst, and the flood of heinous words came beating against the very walls of the sacred edifice.

Nothing can be hidden in a village. Life is carried on in broad daylight. The ditches, the stones, the bushes have eyes. Everyone knew very well that Abbé Mignot and "the pretty Mother," as she was currently called, had never met anywhere but in the church, the door of which was open to all. The pealing of the organ and the pure voice rising to the rafters ought, it would seem, to have counteracted the poison of malevolent insinuations.

"Certainly," said the peasants, "they are doing no harm, *as long as they keep on singing !*"

Occasionally, when the organ was silent, Mother Rosalie knelt in the confessional. Busybodies, stationed behind pillars, considered that she remained there too long, and that she confessed oftener than necessary. This was all that any one could find to say against them. I did my best to defend them, when occasion arose, but the only effect of my pleading, I fear, was to give more importance to the spiteful words.

Meanwhile, Abbé Mignot and Mother Rosalie continued happy in their music and their friendship. I never knew Mother Rosalie, and will not invent a psychology for her. We exchanged a few words on several occasions, and I received the impression of a remarkably refined nature. Whatever I might say beyond this would be drawn from my imagination. With regard to the Abbé, the reader is as well qualified to judge him as I. Bound over to continence by an adept in the reverse, he resigned himself to inevitable fate, the cruelty of which he had recognized when it was too late. Heaven, chance, or destiny had thrown a friendly soul in his path, a prisoner of the same destiny. He surrendered to the delight of the association, happy to come out of himself, to give a little of his life, to receive something of a human life in return, and to feel his pleasure shared. They did not conceal themselves, having nothing to conceal. This seemed to them a safeguard, under the eyes of their brothers in humanity.

The "scandal" lasted three months. One fine day, without warning, an elderly, hunchbacked Sister descended from the coach, and having entered the hospital, exhibited, along with her titles as the new "Mother," the order to "Sister Rosalie" to return *within the hour* to the convent. Sister Rosalie bowed her head in submission, asked whether time would be allowed her for one leave-taking, and upon receiving a negative answer, retired to her chamber,

“to pray and to obey.” She came out with faltering steps, and departed never to return.

The following day was Sunday. The event had been kept secret for the sake of a more dramatic climax. When the priest, coming before the altar, met the shock of the sardonic joy twisting the lips of the hunchbacked Mother and her three acolytes in the charity of the Lord, he fell a step backward, as if mocked by Satan himself. Pale, shaken, he was unable to restrain the trembling of his lips. The thunderbolt had struck. In the anguish of death he retained the appearance of life, and must play the part of a living man. By an heroic effort he regained self command. Violently the *Introit* rang out, as if from depths beyond the grave, and in it were mingled the tragedy of the man and of the God.

There was but one word at the end of mass:

“*Monsieur le curé* made the pretty Mother sing too much. She has gone away to rest.”

Last month I met Abbé Mignot out among the rocks of Deux Fontaines. He sat with knitted brows at the foot of a bush, and nervously turned the pages of his breviary. He was evidently making a desperate effort to fasten down his wandering attention. He did not notice me, and had not my dog run up to him, I should have turned and walked away, to avoid disturbing him in his lonely struggle. When he saw me he rose, afraid of having been

caught betraying something of himself. I held out my hand in friendship, and this time I would gladly have stopped for a talk had I not seemed to read in his eyes an entreaty to pass on without speaking. I obeyed the silent appeal. But yielding to an obscure need—

“*Monsieur le curé*,” I said, “you ought to be careful. There are snakes among those stones. You must have been warned before?”

“Yes, I know,” he answered in a muffled voice. “This place is infested with vipers—most pernicious beasts, *Monsieur*. I hope that on your side you will be able to guard against them.”

MASTER BAPTIST, JUDGE

XIII

MASTER BAPTIST, JUDGE

WHAT kind of justice did Saint Louis dispense under his oak tree? History does not tell us that he was a doctor of law. Everything leads us to suppose that he owed extremely little if anything at all to Papinian, Ulpian, or Tribonian. He was, of course, a Saint, and those among us chosen by Providence to make Its Supreme Will known receive appropriate inspiration from on high. King Solomon, like other Asiatic kings, who are by their people regarded as mouthpieces of divine wisdom, consulted no text when he spoke the famous judgment upon which his glory still rests.

Jews or Christians, the ancient leaders of the people judged in equity, and without too great difficulty arrived at an approximate justice, superior to the "judgments of God," which had too often what looked like the iniquitous unfairness of chance. Codes, by their inflexible rules applied to every case, have overthrown the ancient order, under which an arbitrary procedure fitted the law to each individual transgression. Laws and judges have since become more flexible, they would otherwise be intolerable,

but they are still too rigid to bend felicitously to the modifications by which natural right might be promoted. In addition to which, gratuitous "justice" not infrequently ruins the person seeking it.

For all these reasons—fear of the law, which pounces upon poor people they know not whence, fear of the hardened judge who refers the case to his learning rather than to his conscience—our peasants in Western France with difficulty make up their minds to set in motion the so-called "protective" machinery of the law. Even the settlement of a dispute before a justice of the peace seems an extreme measure, and they have recourse to it only under great stress, which is a matter for rejoicing, for such is the "social order," that without this fortunate tendency, mankind, being entirely composed of people who complain, or have reason to complain, law courts would need to be made big enough to accommodate the entire human race.

In the country, sources of disagreement abound. The limb of a tree stretching beyond a fixed boundary, a vagrant root, a fruit dropping on the wrong side of a hedge, the use of a stream, a right of way, may bring up interpretations of customs giving to conflicting interests occasion for dispute. Before coming to the last expedient of going to law, quarrels, insults, and blows perform their office of preparing the way for reconciliation, which eventually results from nervous or muscular exhaustion. A good hand-

to-hand fight would constitute a "judgment of God" not without its merits, but for the temptation to "appeal" by nocturnal reprisals on innocent crops.

All that might take one very far. Which is the reason why we often find in country districts certain natural-born arbiters, who bear the same relation to judges that sorcerers do to doctors. The judge is the Hippocrates of social maladies, even as the physician is the judge of physiological disorders. The power to judge and the power to heal are acquired by some mysterious method concerning which rustic clients and patients have very misty notions. Judge and physician often make mistakes, and these create in men's minds a dismay greater than the comfort induced by their most authentic successes.

Is even learning absolutely necessary to make one competent to judge and to heal? In olden days this ability was a gift from heaven, a matter exclusively of divine inspiration, which invested a man with the requisite faculties. Why should it no longer be the same? The peasant's slow wit still clings to the old conceptions and retains the imprint of past beliefs. He therefore prefers the wizard to the doctor, whom science has stripped of the prestige of mysteriousness. In the same way, he prefers—rather than to seek advice from competent sources—to consult concerning his rights, or the conduct of his affairs, one of his own sort, totally ignorant, and playing the part of doctor of law from inspiration.

I once knew, long, long ago, alas, one of these improvised Solomons, whose reputation for legal knowledge had spread from parish to parish over a considerable area of the Woodland of the Vendée. Baptist Merian, better known by the name of Master Baptist, was a peasant of uncouth appearance, who personally looked after the property apportioned to him by heaven and the inheritance laws. He was a big fellow whose once-powerful muscles were becoming overlaid with fat as he neared his seventieth year, the period when I first happened upon him in the exercise of his functions. His purplish, pock-marked face very nearly concealed in its fleshy folds two small gray eyes which pierced an interlocutor directly through. He had a voice of thunder, and the gestures of a thunderer. He had the imposing utterance of one passing absolute judgments on men and things. He was like Zeus whose frown shook Olympus, when he gave orders to take the mare to pasture or harness the oxen to the plough. And yet he was at bottom a timorous spirit, very attentive to the suggestions of prudence, and careful never to push any matter to a violent issue.

His adversary, whoever contradicted him, was generally called a "blockhead," and when Master Baptist had thus pronounced himself nothing remained for the sentenced one but to bow his head in silence, which was what all around him were in the habit of doing. No one could have told whence he

derived his legal authority. He made no claim to anything so contemptible as a knowledge of the law, for he could scarcely read, and with difficulty could sign his name. He was none too pleasant a neighbour, and had on various occasions started lawsuits which he had wisely brought to a close by a more or less advantageous settlement, giving as his reason that the judge in his opinion was a "blockhead." The consideration he enjoyed was not lessened by this, for he continued to speak of his litigations as if he had won his cases; it was even noticeable that the magistrate who had earned that unpleasant epithet from his client lost, to a certain extent, the respect in which the community had held him.

Master Baptist was not one of those geniuses who need to blow their horn. Respectful of everybody's right to manage his own affairs, he never ventured to offer advice to any one. At the most, if he saw a field which did not carry out his idea of a proper rotation of crops, or a field badly fenced, or an animal in poor condition, he would express his view that the owner was a "blockhead," and public opinion could do nothing but record the condemnation, from which there was no appeal. Far from protesting against Master Baptist's uniform verdicts, people would at the least disagreement, the first difficulty, come running to him to explain their case, inquire what their chances were of success, and often beg him to arbitrate.

With great dignity, with benevolence, even, he would receive these visitors—if it were winter, by the hearth in the kitchen, which is the countryman's parlour; if warm weather, by the house door, a few feet from the black drain into which the sink emptied the odoriferous extract of culinary operations. Comfortably seated in a quaint semicircular arm-chair, the wool-stuffed cushion of which was covered with ticking, he would listen to the men who had come to consult him and who remained standing, cap in hand, while they told their interminable and tangled stories. When they stopped for lack of breath, Master Baptist would ask questions, which usually called forth prolix replies. Finally he would speak:

“Peter, it is you who are the blockhead.” And Peter would have no choice but to submit to John. Both would then pull their blue caps over their ears and sit down for a glass of white wine, which by a reversal of ancient custom constituted the fee of judge to litigants. Often they came from a great distance to find out which was the blockhead, and having found out, departed content, glad to have ended the quarrel without assistance from the omniscient bench.

It was something of an undertaking at that time to reach the out-of-the-way hamlet where Master Baptist uttered his oracles. Now, country roads connect “The Pines” with the rest of the world. I used to reach it in those days by way of the rocky

ridge stretching for two miles between Mouilleron-en-Pareds and La Chataignerie. "The Rocks," as the ridge is locally called, form the last buttress of the Woodland hills. From the top a vast wooded stretch is visible, every field being enclosed by a belt of tall trees. The rocks themselves are covered with gorse and furze, and giant chestnut trees, twisted and gnarled by old storms. Suddenly the rocks part, and in the hollow they reveal lie meadows enlivened by the song of running water. There humble huts group themselves in hamlets, concealed by the high trees. "The Pines," Master Baptist's domain, was doubtless distinguished in former days by the presence of a pine tree. The tree disappeared under the axe of time. But a cluster of houses remains, sheltered from the world by the high rampart of "The Rocks."

One day, as I was hunting in that neighbourhood, I suddenly from my hill-top perceived the roofs of "The Pines," before anything had betrayed the fact that a human habitation was at hand. The strangeness of the place, as a place to live in, aroused my curiosity. I had met Master Baptist at Mouilleron. The occasion seemed propitious for a renewal of the acquaintance. I entered a courtyard littered with manure, and there, behind a yoke of oxen drinking at a trough, I discovered the master of the house, seated in his dooryard, surrounded by his poultry, and busy as usual dealing justice.

It was vacation time. Baptist's son, a law student at Poitiers and a prospective notary, was cheerfully loading dung into a cart (no one dreamed of calling upon him for enlightenment), while the unlettered father learnedly dispensed the law. In front of the solemn arbitrator, and at a respectful distance from him, a man stood waiting open mouthed for the solicited verdict. With a kindly wave of the hand, Master Baptist motioned to me to wait until the audience should be closed. I therefore remained where I was, and watched the plaintiff—a big, gray-headed fellow who was mechanically twisting between his hands the greasy crown of a brimless hat.

"You are sure that all you have told me is true?" Master Baptist was saying, and I could see that he was inclined to apply his epithet of "blockhead" to the absent party in the dispute.

"I have told you everything just as it is," answered the other.

"Then you may tell Michael that he is a blockhead. Be sure you tell him so, will you?"

"Yes, Master Baptist, I will tell him this very evening. But what if he says it isn't so?"

"If he answers that it isn't so, no later than tomorrow you will have notice served on him."

The idea of sending his adversary a stamped document seemed to fill the plaintiff with keen joy.

"I surely will serve notice on him!" he gleefully exclaimed.

Then, scratching his head: "But suppose he won't have notice served on him, what then?"

At these words Master Baptist rose on a gust of excitement. I am not aware what his idea was of a man "who will not have notice served on him." But the case manifestly appeared to him out of all measure horrific. An agonized silence followed. Then the storm burst.

"If he refuses to have notice served on him," thundered Master Baptist, "you may take your two hoofs and give him a couple of swift kicks in the shins."

Everyone heaved a sigh of relief. The point of law was solved. The plaintiff, his spirit forever at rest, vigorously fell upon his judge's hand and pressed it, along with what was left of his hat.

"That's it! That's it! My two hoofs—I will not fail!"

As for me, I was filled with admiration at the point chosen for giving full force to the arguments of jurisprudence—the part of the leg where, just under the skin, the tibia presents a collection of nervous fibres which a nimble wooden shoe can crush against the bone, is certainly a well-chosen spot, and calculated to give effectiveness to the energy of the opposing party.

The white wine was brought. The student of law left his dung heap to come and clink glasses.

“All the same,” said the good client, dropping into his chair, “I should like to know a question for which Master Baptist would have no answer.”

“Oh, well,” replied the judge, modestly, “one sees so many things. That is how one learns.”

THE BULLFINCH AND THE MAKER OF
WOODEN SHOES

XIV

THE BULLFINCH AND THE MAKER OF WOODEN SHOES

IN CONNECTION with the scandalous conduct of a lady pigeon I shall presently speak of comparative psychology in the world of animals. The capacity of animals for emotion and sentiment is naturally the first psychic phenomenon presenting itself to the observer. Their manner of expressing the sensations received from the exterior world, and the impulses resulting from those sensations constitute what may without derision be called the moral life of animals, leading, just as it does in the case of man, to the best adjustment possible between the individual organism and surrounding conditions.

Many good people will doubtless be distressed by the idea that morality, in which they take such pride, though not always preaching it by example, instead of falling from heaven in the form of indisputable commands, has its roots far down in the animate hierarchy. If they were willing to reflect, they would be able to understand that undeniable analogies of organism involve a corresponding analogy of function. Nothing further is necessary to show

the high significance of a study of comparative sentimentality and the morality illustrating it, determined by the organism that the great mass of living creatures have in common. The amusing side of the thing is that the majority of those who will cry out against this statement will in the same breath speak of the "intelligence" of animals, and will quote some story about a dog or cat or elephant, without suspecting that their very manner of presenting the problem solves the question of its principle, and leaves them with the sole resource of rebelling against the consequences of that principle.

But it is not my intention to speak, as the reader may be thinking, of Montargis' dog, or any other animal known to history, for the astonishing proofs of sagacity he may have given. As I mean to relate a very simple but authentic story of brotherly love between a bullfinch and a maker of wooden shoes, my subject is more particularly the exchange of sentiments between two species of animal, a phenomenon in which the kinship of souls is very clearly demonstrated.

It is common enough for man to give affection to the animals that surround him, an affection generally proportioned to the service he expects of them. Disinterestedness is rarely coupled with power.

Man having made himself the strongest of living creatures, annexes and subordinates such animals as he needs for the satisfaction of his wants. The

hunter loves his dog, but if the latter fails to retrieve, what harsh words are showered on him, to say nothing of blows, the danger of which perpetually hangs over a dog. Friendship between man and man is all too often based upon arrangements in some way profitable to both. Is it surprising, then, if an analysis of the affections of the more elementary orders of the living hierarchy explains the condescension of the strong for the defenceless weak by attributing it to self-interest? And may not the devotion of the weak to the strong arise partly from a need for protection? But self-interest does not account for everything—whatever utilitarian philosophy may say.

I once knew a cock whose favourite haunt was the back of a Percheron mare in the stable. It may be that the bird's greed relieved the quadruped of certain irritating parasites. But why did the cock never turn to any other than his special friend, the mare? And why would any other fowl have been swiftly shaken off her back? The two animals "took to each other," that is all one can say. You should have seen the mare look over her shoulder with beatific eyes when her cock appeared, and seen him stand on her complaisant rump, flapping his wings and crowing triumphantly.

I say nothing of the animals in our menageries, who are trained to tolerate one another for the astonishment of the idle spectator. They exemplify

a distortion of nature. But we see daily very strong attachments between cats and dogs, who are natural enemies. Is the dog, whom we accuse of servility for licking the hand of the master who beats him, above or beneath the dignity of friendship? He is certainly not moved by cowardice, for he will hurl himself against any one attacking that same brutal man of whom he might justly complain. Is it, then, that the forgiveness preached by the Gospel is easier for him than for us? Are dogs more "Christian" than men? That would make obvious the reason why men often misinterpret dogs.

We cannot deny that signs of altruism, born principally of love, manifest themselves on all sides in the animal world. The defence of the young is the commonest instance of it. The courtship of the male is also marked by exhibitions of generosity, even as it is on the Boulevard. When a cock finds a worm, does he not summon his entire harem, and magnificently toss the savoury morsel to them?

The bullfinch and the maker of wooden shoes who loved each other tenderly had no remotest expectation of reward beside the pleasure of living and telling their love, each in his own language at first, and later, each, as far as he could, in the language of the other. I have forgotten the shoemaker's name, but I could go blindfold to his house on the main street of the village in the Vendée where I used yearly to spend a happy month of vacation. I can

see his white sign board with a magnificent yellow wooden shoe agreeably surrounded by decorative additions. I can see the little door with glass panes, giving access to the shop, hardly larger than a wardrobe, where rows of wooden shoes hung from the ceiling, were hooked to the walls, littered the floor, and even overran into the street.

The little court behind the shop has remained particularly vivid in my memory. That was the workshop. There, with both hands clasped around the tool that flung chips into his face, the artist would miraculously draw from a block of wood braced against his chest the form of a wooden shoe. Julius II, watching the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel as they sprang from Michael Angelo's brush, could not have been more impressed than was my youth before the prodigies performed by the shoemaker.

He, for the increase of my pleasure, seemed to share it; he accompanied the manœuvres of his adze with commentaries calculated to drive well into my soul the particular merits of his work. He was a poor, pale, thin, fragile being, himself carved down as if by an adze, rubbed flat and hollowed out by sickness. Folds of white skin below his hairless chin trembled when he moved. His eyes were of no colour. He had a nasal, far-away voice, like that of a consumptive ventriloquist. I never knew anything about him. I do not believe he had any family—I never saw a petticoat that seemed to belong in the

house. All day long he worked at his wooden shoes without a word, perhaps without a thought, happy in his little friend the bullfinch on whom were centred all the emotions of his existence.

Although I have forgotten the man's name, I remember the bullfinch's. It was Mignon. There was nothing to make him look different from the rest of his kind. As you entered the shop, you saw against the wall a large cage decorated with rude carvings, on which the shoemaker had lavished all the fancy of his art. In this, hopping from one wooden bar to the other, was a little bright red ball with a black head, lighted by two jet-black eyes gleaming with intelligence. The tiny hooked beak retreating into the throat did not appear fashioned for conversation, yet if during the shoemaker's absence you crossed the threshold, a muffled voice, which seemed to issue from the depths of the walls, greeted you with a cry, repeated over and over: "Someone in the shop, someone in the shop," etc., etc. By the smothered quality, the nasal tone, you recognized the master's voice. But it was not he who spoke, for you could see him coming from the courtyard with his mouth shut, while the sentinel's warning continued. It was the bullfinch, who with unfailing vigilance stood guard over the rows of wooden shoes.

For Mignon talked like a "real person," with a dainty articulation much clearer than that of the

most accomplished parrot. The shoemaker had, I suppose, taken him from the nest, and taught him from tenderest infancy. In close association with, and under the suggestion of, a mentality which spared no pains in the education of a friend, the bird had by a loving effort raised himself to the level of the man who had lagged behind in the evolution of his own race. They had met on the same plane, and both having capacity for affection had seized upon each other with atomic grapnels better than they might have done had both been human.

To please his friend, Mignon had accepted articulate speech as a means of communication, for, needless to say, his vocabulary was not limited to the sentry challenge: "Who goes there?" but grew daily more extensive. On the other side, which was no less remarkable, the human teacher had let himself be taught the fluty language of his woodland friend. When the shoemaker wished to convey something to his feathered comrade, he would break forth in "twee-twees," accompanied by a sort of hoarse, throaty trill whose slightest inflection is comprehensible to all the bullfinches in the world. They had thus two languages at their disposal from which each could draw according to the inspiration of the moment. A strange dialogue, in which it was often the man who said "twee-twee," while the bird answered with dictionary words.

The door of the cage always stood open. But

Mignon loved the peace of his home. In his natural state the bullfinch prefers the most secluded and silent spot in the forest. His character is both trusting and contemplative. I remember once finding a nest of bullfinches in an ancient oak. The father and mother could not believe that I was an enemy. They perched on a bough at hardly more than a yard's distance from me, without a flutter or a note of alarm, as if to give me time and opportunity to admire their little ones. They made no sound until my departure, when, as if to do the honours of the thicket, they uttered farewell "twee-twees." As he was afraid of cats and dogs, Mignon never went into the street. The shop and the courtyard were his whole domain, with the cage for meals and meditation.

In the courtyard, among the reddish alder logs, Mignon would come and go with evident enjoyment, scratching the wood to whet his beak, or searching it for dainty bits. I can still see those splendid shafts, golden yellow, marbled with sanguine red, on which the bird would sometimes stand motionless, swelling his copper-coloured throat, or at other times hop and flutter and cheep and softly twitter, to win a glance or a silent smile from his friend. Then he would fly straight to the shoemaker's shoulder and peck his face and say: "Good morning, my friend, I love you, indeed I do. Have you slept well?" The answer to which would be given in human "twee-

twees," until the neglected wooden shoe recalled the forgetful workman to his duty.

Best of all was the song and dance.

"Come now, Mignon, dance the polka for your friend."

Mignon would stretch himself proudly to his full height, uttering three rhythmic "twee-twees," and hop from one foot to the other, keeping perfect time. He seemed to enjoy himself hugely, and the shoemaker, who supplemented the music by an exact imitation of it, expressed boundless delight by the contortions of his colourless face.

A childish amusement, some will say. Yet what is more important than loving? And if we love, what matters the way of expressing a deep mutual tenderness? The shoemaker did not exhibit his friend's accomplishments to the casual or the indifferent. The desire to "show off" was foreign to these two. They simply lived for each other, and their intimacy behind closed doors, far from jealous eyes, must have had exquisite sweetness.

I am aware that there should be some effective ending to my story. The truth is that I know nothing beyond what I have told. The maker of wooden shoes and the bullfinch have remained very much alive in my memory—the end of the episode has escaped it. Did I go there one day and not find them? Or is it not more likely that I ceased to go there? It was all so long ago!

I am certain that whichever of them went first was not long survived by the other. At least, I like to think so, for if the shoemaker had replaced Mignon by another bullfinch, or if Mignon had found it in his heart to dance the polka for Brossard, the nailer, who used to make such a racket on the other side of the street, I should lose a supreme illusion concerning the heart of man and bird. If we lose our faith in man, whom experience may lead us to suspect of selfishness, let us retain our respectful esteem for animals.

ABOUT NESTS

XV

ABOUT NESTS

CHILDREN are always interested in nests—thrilled by the mystery of them, filled with admiring wonder at the cunning of the little feathered creature in concealing its brood from the enemy, whether it be man or hawk, crow or magpie. The impulse to appropriate any living thing (an instinct inherited from his carnivorous ancestors), indeed, a whole collection of irresistible impulses direct the murderous sporting instinct of the future lord of creation toward the delicate feathery structure. Sympathy is as yet non-existent in the child man, for he has never suffered. He is carried away by delight in the unknown, his eyes widen with wonder, his hands reach out, and at the first touch irretrievable harm is done.

But no sooner has the nest been torn from the branch, and no sooner are the little ones, hideous in their grotesque nudity, scattered on the ground, than he is filled with dismay, like the school boy with all the parts of his watch spread on the table before him. Having looked at everything, analyzed it,

touched it, he could go his way with a light heart if only he were able to fit the pieces together again, and reconstruct a whole. But it is too late. Our first impulse is a death-dealing one. A sense of the uselessness of destruction is necessary to awaken pity in us for whatever has life. I have sometimes seen those very school boys who massacre birds for fun, go back, ashamed of the stupid wrong committed, and awkwardly try to put the nest in its place, with the little ones in it, then go away, looking over their shoulder to witness the gratitude due to them from the despairing family for their generous effort. On the following day the boys return to look, and find a graveyard.

Many birds forsake their progeny at the least break in the usual course of things. Unaccountable panic seizes them, abruptly quenching the overmastering love that before had governed the activities of the pair. If you merely touch a young pigeon, the parents will from that moment onward hear his clamour for food with indifference—they will let him starve, while the drama of rearing new young dimly takes shape in their mysterious minds. Other more courageous birds will fight to the end without yielding, they will fly into snares in the attempt to reach their brood, they will come daily to feed their young in the cage, and if a strange egg has been introduced into their nest, whether by the hand of man or the cunning of the cuckoo, they will make

no difference between the bastard and their legitimate offspring.

I have witnessed some fierce battles, notably that of a pair of warblers against a magpie, who, undeterred by the stones I was throwing, managed in less than five minutes to remove from their nest into her own, as a treat for her young magpies, all the little warblers just full-fed with succulent insects. Whither turn for help against the rivalry of appetites organized by Providence? "The reason of the strongest is always the best," sadly observes the poet philosopher. A sorrowful avowal, that, which leaves us, for sole comfort, the hypothetical felicity of another world. But what could be more unjust than to exclude from a celestial paradise these secondary creatures, victims of our common fate, who in the beginning possessed the earthly paradise, and were driven from it in the company of our erring ancestors, without having followed their sinful example?

Until the order of things changes, all that the weak can do is to cry out their protest, their vain appeal to universal justice, which, deaf, insensible, and paralyzed, sits in mute contemplation of the disorder composing the order of the world.

Man, the supreme arbiter of the destinies of his inferiors, has arrogated all rights. The child who lets a bird flutter at the end of a string only to jerk it to the ground when the poor creature finally

thought itself free, lives in his own person the evolution from the frank cruelty of the savage to the decent hypocrisies of civilized barbarism. Man is, indeed, the first one whom animals learn to guard against. Wherever there are no men, or few, birds are among the first to become fearless. I have seen nests built in wide recesses and fully exposed to view, amid the desert ruins of the citadel of Corinth.

Better still, I once knew—it is now more than fifty years ago—a wonderful garden, in part cultivated, in part allowed to follow the fancies of vegetation running wild, where two old people, of beloved memory, used to walk and take their last pleasures as life neared its close. A large, typically French garden, with symmetrical flower beds bordered with box. A long arbour formed a wall at the farther side, and had at each end a circular bower, bright in springtime with the rosy blaze of Judas trees. In the centre was a fountain covered by a high white dome upheld by three slender Ionic columns, delicately mottled with rose-coloured lichens. At the summit of the dome the sculptor had carved a vase of formal shape, from which sprang a sheaf of flowers that took from the mosses overgrowing it an appearance of life. Under the arch was a bird with spread wings, bearing the motto of the former masters of the domain, whose name you will find in Hozier: “*Altiora contendimus omnes.*” The monument dated from the end of the 16th century. Its remains,

scattered in "artistic ruins," now decorate an ornamental grove.

Never was a spot less disturbed by the activities of the world, nowhere was solitude more calculated to win man from his fellows and leave him to the companionship of trees and animals. Beyond the harbour lay a meadow, a brook, woods. No human habitation anywhere near. Peace—the great peace of nature. Sheltered by the high wall, animals lived happy and unafraid of man, from whom they received only kindness. I can remember goldfinch nests among the rose bushes within reach of my hand. I was early taught to touch them only with my eyes.

In her very bedroom, the lady of the manor gave shelter to swallows. Traces of nests may still be seen on the great rafters of the ceiling. In spring, one day at dawn, the travellers, arriving from their great journey, would come tapping with beak and claw at the high windows. The aged dame would immediately rise and let in her friends. Greetings would ensue—enthusiastic greetings after the long separation. Three or four birds, sometimes half a dozen, would wheel about the vast chamber, with little sharp cries expressing joy in their return and their hospitable reception. They perched on the great wardrobes, and twittered for happiness, their little ruby throats swelling below their black hoods. All day long they came and went. Soon, one might

see a swallow drop on to the water of a trench, and rest there with wings outspread, then rise into the air, and gather on her wet feathers the dust of earth needed to make mortar for her nest. Then began the work of masonry. The basket-shaped wall rose quickly, formed of thin layers of clay, one above another, and as soon as the nest was finished, an indentation fashioned in the edge by the dainty black beak informed one that the laying of eggs had begun.

Three or four nests among the rafters became in time a whole aviary, for the young birds, returning the following year, often selected their birthplace as a home. There they reared their family. At first peep of dawn, the father from outside and the mother from inside begged to have the window opened. They met each other with expressions of delight and flew skyward in quest of the supply of insects imperiously demanded by the noisy and hungry nestlings. As soon as the successful hunter appeared, and before he could fairly get his claws into the earthen parapet, six gaping throats were outstretched to catch the prey. This business filled the day. A newspaper, spread on the floor, received all incongruous happenings. In the evening, when the lamp was lighted, we were sometimes startled by a sudden outburst of quarrelling up among the rafters. It might be that a small bird was out of his customary place, and was beginning his apprenticeship in life by defending

his rights, as well as he could, against the selfish infringements of an enterprising brother. A muffled call from the mother stilled the tumult, and fear of punishment brought the children back to moderation, or perhaps resignation. And then autumn took on the sharpness of winter, and all the swallows, assembled on the summit of a neighbouring elm, held a great council of departure. They talked the whole day. But their discussion, unlike ours, was a preface to action. They started before sunrise of the day after. Sadly their old friend bade them farewell: "Go, my dear ones, you intend to come back, but the time is not far when I shall no longer be here to open the window at your home coming!" The swallows still return. But for a long time, a very long time, the window has not been opened.

Alas! the loveliest part of the setting has likewise disappeared. The white dome of the fountain, with its rosy colonnade, has been broken up, and replaced by a hideous rockery in the style of Chatou. The seemly classic rectangular flower beds, with their severe arrangement, have made room for a wide lawn dotted with artistic plots of shrubbery. The long arbour and the Judas trees have blazed in the fireplace on winter evenings. But, near or far, imagination can restore them. I find myself walking through twisted underbrush to spy upon domestic scenes in nests. I have retained a particularly vivid memory of the tragedy which revealed to me for

the first time the distressing vicissitudes of the struggle for life.

At the foot of the long arbour lay a dying birdling. He had as yet no feathers, but a thin black down covered his bluish skin now painfully heaving with the last spasms of agony. My first motion was to climb in search of the nest from which the victim had fallen. I had not mounted a yard from the ground before I found a little dead body similar to the one I had just seen, and while I peered upward into the shadow, what should tumble on to my head but a third member of the same brood. I finally distinguished the nest, and soon little, stifled cries warned me of something going on in it. I bent to one side, to get a better view, and discovered in the midst of the down-lined dwelling a great grayish black bird surrounded by three wretched wee ones who had not as yet been tossed into the abyss, but who were rendered miserably uncomfortable by the inordinate growth of their big brother.

A cuckoo had deposited her egg there, and the parents, stupidly deceived, lavishing the same care upon the intruder as upon their own young, had succeeded only in absurdly favouring the strongest. Meanwhile, he had grown to twice or thrice the size of his "brothers," and without, presumably, seeking any satisfaction but his "liberty," as the economists put it, he was taking up the room of others, for the sole reason that the development of his organs required it.

Like all young birds, the baby cuckoo automatically flapped his wings, to exercise his joints. In a normal nest, this movement of each inmate is limited and regulated by the same movement on the part of the others. But here, too great strength was in conflict with too great weakness, and the cuckoo's thick, stumpy wings, on which feathers were already appearing, spread to the very edge of the nest, lifting the feeble little ones on to the monster's back, whence a shake flung them overboard. The crime occurred even while I watched. The worst of it was seeing the stupid parents, in spite of all, diligently feeding the infamous fratricide. Careless of the lamentations of their own children, they could see in the nest only the huge hollow of a voracious beak, which gobbled whatever they brought, notwithstanding the timid efforts of the competitors, doomed beforehand to defeat. And so the disproportion in growth augmented daily, the one taking everything, and the others condemned to watch him helplessly. The social question is repeated in every thicket on earth!

For the principle of the thing, I replaced two little birds in the nest. They were promptly hurled to the ground. Next day, the whole crime was accomplished, and the false father and the false mother were still idiotically wearing themselves out to nourish their children's murderer. What to do about it? How many human stories there are, in the likeness of

that incident! One cannot even justly blame the cuckoo, if the great principle: "Remove yourself, that I may have your place!" remains in this universe the watchword added by Providence to the express recommendation to love one another.

A DOMESTIC DRAMA

XVI

A DOMESTIC DRAMA

I AM fond of observing animals, real ones, whose spirit has not been perverted by the insufferable pretence and affectations which are all too often accompaniments of the human form. Whoever watches them with a seeing eye may gather deep lessons from the activities of animal life. In man and beast the motions of being are governed by one philosophy, however much trouble the sacristans of letters may take to separate under the heads of "instinct" and "thought" phenomena differing in degree but identical in nature.

Analogies of structure and function in the entire hierarchy of the organic world were one day perceived, and Lamarck and Darwin drew from these their well-known conclusions, to the confusion of biblical tradition. Comparative anatomy and comparative physiology are now flourishing sciences of which academicians find it less easy to assimilate the results than to proclaim the failure. At the point we have reached in the knowledge of vital manifestations all along the scale of living creatures, unlimited material is day by day accumulating for the

science of comparative psychology which will soon be established.

While experts are elaborating general laws, the profane may be permitted to set down the observations suggested to them by the passing show of life. In this character I wish to relate a domestic drama the scene of which, I grieve to say, was my own garden. The actors, fair readers, were simple pigeons. The difference between feathers and hair will perhaps seem to you to excuse many things. You shall compare and judge. My only ambition is to point out analogies resulting from the nature of things, and lead such of my contemporaries as do me the honour to read what I write, to a wider comprehension of the human soul.

Our natural tendency is to observe the thoughts and feelings of our equals rather than those of animals. They touch us more nearly, and we often need, in the course of our study of humanity, to balance the indulgence of our judgments upon ourselves by the severity of our judgments upon others. Only, man under observation has the advantage of articulate speech, which is, of course, a disadvantage to the observer. For everyone will agree that man makes use of this chiefly to pervert, to conceal, or at the very least to disguise, the truth. Hence arise difficulties of analysis, which are not encountered among the innocent beasts of the field whom the imperfection of their organism obliges to show them-

selves as nature made them. In defining the characteristics of man, it has been said that he alone among animals is gifted with laughter, with ability to light a fire, and to state abstractions by means of articulate speech. We must not neglect to mention his conspicuous faculty for lying. Animals can dissimulate, for the purpose of seizing the weaker, or escaping from the stronger. Man alone has received from Providence the gift of a perfect mendacity. So he often disparages animals, and accuses them of cynicism! Ah—if dogs could speak!

But this tale is concerned with pigeons, and when I tell you that sitting at my work table I have my dovecote all day under my eyes, you will understand that I am necessarily familiar with the manœuvres of the amorous tribe. The pigeon has a reputation for sentimentality. He is inclined toward voluptuousness, and has officially but one mate. His fidelity has been sufficient to arouse the wonder of man. Poetry, music, and art, after long centuries, still find a rich subject in the attachment of turtle doves.

“Two pigeons loved with a tender love——”

It is still usual for the fruit vender in Rue St. Denis, swooning in the conjugal arms, to call her spouse “My pigeon!” and for him to answer in a sigh, “My dove!” Well—at the risk of bringing disillusion to these ingenuous souls, and driving them to search for other comparisons, I feel obliged to es-

tablish facts in their truth, and show pigeons guilty of human frailty.

The ones whose story it is my sad duty to record were two big blue "Romans," united by the most demonstrative tenderness. They had no other occupation than to bill and coo all day long. After their eggs had been laid, they took turns at sitting on them, each for half a day at a time—and as soon as the little ones had their first feathers, returned to their ardent lovemaking.

One day I perceived on a chestnut tree belonging to me a big white pigeon who seemed to find the neighbourhood to its liking. After a few short turns about the place, the newcomer, in the course of its search for food, settled upon the home of the two Romans, and deliberately entered it, attracted by the buckwheat and corn. Mr. Pigeon drove the intruder out. He returned, and the performance of expulsion began over again. This game lasted all day.

The obstinacy of the newcomer seemed to me to indicate the weaker sex—which diagnosis was confirmed by my recognition that the Roman pigeon, while upholding his rights as first occupant, merely went through the motions of battle, and never effectively attacked his opponent. For eight days this proceeding continued. Several hundred times a day the white pigeon flew from the tree to the dovecote, only to turn back at the first threat of the tenant's beak, and then return at once from her branch to the

blue pigeon's door, where, owing to his prompt hostility, she would barely alight.

Wearying of the performance, I, finally, with a desire to protect my friends, the Romans, caught the white bird, and presented it to a friend who was improving some property in the wilds of Sannois. My chestnut tree relapsed into peace, and the feathered pair continued to taste the joys of love.

Two months later, to my surprise, I perceived my white visitor on the chestnut tree. She had already recommenced her visits to the Roman family, and seemed very little affected by the hostile reception given to her persistent offers of friendship. At the same time a letter from Sannois informed me that the prisoner, taking advantage of a hole in the netting, had escaped. Touched by the sentiment that had brought a wandering soul back from such a distance to the home of her choice, I resolved worthily to exercise the hospitality so perseveringly demanded of me. I had a new house built, and I gave a beautiful husband to the lady whose heart was so obviously oppressed by the weight of solitude. Peace settled upon the amorous pigeon world. Each bent his energies, in accordance with established order, to the occupation of reproducing himself, and seemed to find happiness therein.

Who does not know that the joys of this world are brief?

One day the white lady's husband was found dead,

without having given any sign of illness. His funeral was scarcely over, I blush to say, before the light creature began visiting the Roman pair again. I soon noticed that the male pigeon had reached a sort of reconciliation to those obstinate visits. He continued, to be sure, to drive the intruder away, but so nervelessly that she returned after a few flaps of her wings, without even bothering to go back as far as the chestnut tree.

Soon, I realized that the fascinating person with the white plumage had free access to the home of her neighbours. When I inquired into the reason for the Roman not barring his entrance to the stranger, I found that his mate, hunched in a ball, was seriously ill, and that the perturbed husband would not leave her. I greatly admired this exemplary conduct. The trouble was that the stranger, taking advantage of the open door, formed the annoying habit of perching there inside, day and night. The pigeon stayed close by his mate, and hunched himself also in a ball to express his sympathy, while the stranger looked, dry-eyed, on the ruin of the home, and waited for her day.

As this day was long in coming, the hussy ventured to intrude upon the sorrow of the suffering couple. Thereupon, the sick nurse, listening only to the voice of duty, hurled himself upon the wicked beast, and with beak and claw drove her across the threshold—even a little way beyond. Alas! this

was precisely the object of her detestable machinations. The widow wished to be pursued. She succeeded, returning incessantly to the charge—which obliged the pigeon to escort her out of the house—and defending herself only enough to lend vivacity to the encounter. Then, when the moment seemed opportune, she abruptly ceased to resist, and crouching down, half spread her wings, asking that the battle of conjugal duty be transformed into a lovers' contest. Rarely has human creature given such an exhibition of immoral conduct.

I must say that the virtuous pigeon at first expressed his indignation by coos expressive of fury. But what can you expect? The flesh is weak. When temptation is offered every minute of the day there is some excuse for stumbling. I was a witness of my Roman pigeon's weakening. I saw him finally succumb to the suggestions of the wanton, and fall into sin! It is true that, ashamed of his weakness, he immediately chastised vice by pecking the one who had just given him delight, and quickly flew back to the bed of straw where the invalid lay wondering at his prolonged absence.

Every creature has its destiny. The betrayed wife refused to die. She remained motionless all day long, ate copiously, in spite of her illness, and did not waste away. Little by little the gallant husband formed the habit of infidelity, and even ended by showing a grievous alacrity in evil doing. I must,

however, say to his credit, that if he found the attraction of sin stronger now than the call of duty, he never ceased to observe the strictest decorum under the conjugal roof. He always treated the one responsible for his fall as a courtesan whose acquaintance was not to be acknowledged. As soon as they were inside the dovecote, the two accomplices were not acquainted. The Roman pigeon lived faithfully at the side of his Roman wife. The white pigeon would go to roost, with an assumption of indifference, on the highest perch. Bourgeois decency was preserved. As we see it daily among human beings, respectability among animals may be coupled with scandalous debauchery. The sad, confiding little invalid seemed to express gratitude to her spouse, by tender, cuddling motions, to which, I prefer to believe, he did not submit without some feeling of shame. I should think that the victim would have suspected something, if only because the two culprits looked so remarkably above suspicion. But there are especial immunities.

This state of things might have endured indefinitely if the ill-starred idea of an experiment had not come into my mind. I took away the sick bird and isolated her for two days in a cage. I planned to observe the psychology of her return home, fancying that a crisis would be precipitated, from which virtue might issue triumphant.

At first the widower wished to make sure of his

“misfortune.” He searched the garden, then the neighbouring roofs where he had formerly spent long periods in the company of his better half. When he finally believed that his legitimate mate had vanished into nothingness, he plunged into bottomless deeps of bliss with the illegitimate one. What an example to the inhabitants of Passy!

For two days a joy so scandalous reigned in the guilty establishment that I could not resist the desire to break up the indecent festival. I therefore took the unfortunate prisoner and exposed her well in view on the lawn. As soon as the adulterous couple beheld her, the courtesan hastened to the dovecote, doubtless to establish her rights of proprietorship, and the faithless spouse fell furiously upon the wife restored to his bosom. He beat her with wing and beak, uttering angry coos. I supposed that he was calling her to account for her disappearance, and reproaching her with what he might have considered a prank, he whose heart should have been racked with remorse. It seemed to me that he was driving her toward the dovecote, and thinking that it might be well to sustain him in his demand that she resume her position in the home, whence it was high time that the adventuress be expelled, I myself put back the ailing pigeon in the spot from which I had taken her three days before.

I had scarcely left her when a terrible flutter of wings warned me that something was happening.

I hastened back. The irreproachable wife was dead, killed by the lovers, whom two days had sufficed to unite in indissoluble bonds of infamy. The unlucky creature lay with her skull broken open by their beaks, and the murderers sated their ferocity upon the dead body, which I had difficulty in wresting from them.

There are no courts of law in the animal world, wherefore Providence had no option but to crown the triumph of crime with happy peace. This it did with its customary generosity. The two villains live happy in their love. They have had, and will yet have, many children.

SIX CENTS

XVII

SIX CENTS

HERE is the history of a man without a history. As far back as I can remember, I can see in the great court of honour of the Manor, devoted to plebeian uses since the Revolution, Six Cents, the sawyer, silently occupied with making boards out of the trunks of poplars, elms, and oaks, which at the end of my last vacation I had left green and living, filled with the song of birds, and whose corpses I found on my return tragically piled up for the posthumous torture by which man pursues his work of death-dealing civilization.

Jacques Barbot, commonly called Six Cents, was in those days the representative of industry in the rural world; he typified man in the first stage above the purely agricultural labourer of olden times. To prepare the raw material for the next man to use was his social function. He had certainly never given thought to this, any more than to the cruel fate which makes of man the first victim of his inventions, pregnant though they be of future benefit. For how many centuries the grinding of wheat chained the slave to the millstone, until the

day dawned when the beast of burden, the wind, water and steam, came to take his place. Even to-day, how much serf's labour still awaits the ingenuity of future liberators!

It is certain that Six Cents, although he expressed his views to nobody, for discretion of thought was chief among his characteristics, did not feel himself a slave, in his quiet patience under the common subjugation of labour. As it happened, the machine which set him free promptly dealt him his death blow.

Employee and employer as well, he hired a comrade, whose pay was nearly equal to his own, and all the year round, in the cold and the rain, the sun or the wind, he matched himself with untiring energy against the wide-branched giants, and defeated those adversaries. The ever-renewed struggle against the eternal resistance of the woody monsters made up his entire life. Beyond that, no horizon, no thought; his was the unconsciousness of the soul in the making. Gladstone, stupidly and without the excuse of necessity, used to hack down the noble leafy creations that form so great a part of the earth's beauty. Six Cents, as insensible as he to the esthetic aspect of tree life, engaged in a mortal combat to wrest his living from the obstinate fibres clinging to life with obscure yet tenacious vitality.

On winter days, favourable for felling trees, the executioners would arrive on the spot, axe in hand,

to carry out the death sentence pronounced by interest against life and beauty. In the desolate country, overflowed by bands of crows with their ill-omened croaking, the strokes of the sinister axe would echo far around, as they accomplished their work of death. The tall trunk rocks at each deeper entering of the iron, while the plumy branches beat the air in shudders of agony. The rope fastened to the top of the tree grows taut—a sharp blow, followed by a long wail, and the groaning colossus falls heavily to earth. Like a hero on the fields of Ilion hurling himself upon the spoils of the vanquished foe, Six Cents on the instant is chopping, cutting, trimming, drawing lines where the saw is to divide the tree into logs. Soon the stripped shaft, chained to the sawing trestle, will show on its length as well as its girth black lines, drawn straight by aid of a string for the sawyer's reliance in guiding the steel teeth.

One man stands above and one below the trestle. The thin notched blade, working its way forward with a soft swish muffled by the sawdust, rises and falls with the rhythmic motion of the bodies alternately bending down and straightening up. From a distance you see two men in front of each other, one facing earthward, the other skyward, and perpetually bowing as if in mutual greeting. When the entire existence of a human being has for its sole activity an incessant bowing, not even to the tree about to die, but to its corpse, into which he is driv-

ing the iron a little further with each courteous gesture, there results a monotony of sensation, of thought (if the two words may be used in this connection,) progressively benumbing the spirit, or reducing it to the minimum of cogitation compatible with a continuance of life. The inert intelligence becomes atrophied. What is the mentality of the slave harnessed to the millstone? Not greatly superior to that of the beast of burden substituted for him. Six Cents, slaughtering his trees, took from them only vegetative life. His victims unconsciously revenged themselves by bringing him down through the continuity of enforced labour to the lowest rank of conscious life.

One must not suppose that Six Cents was stupid. His countenance, with its regular features, was frank and open. His eyes, which though lacking in fire were gentle and appeared to dwell on something far away, reminded one of those of certain dogs, "very intelligent," but incapable of any effort beyond primitive comprehension. He was not a mere animal, but simply an undeveloped man. He did not know how to read, nor had he ever stopped to wonder what might be contained in a book. To saw to-day, to saw to-morrow: a narrow cycle of dull thoughts brought him continually back to his starting point. The wide gray velvet trousers from the pocket of which protruded the points of a pair of compasses distinguished him from tillers of the soil. The

stamp of science and art was upon him, but so rudimentary, that the appropriate mechanical gesture was the Ultima Thule of his attainment. The smooth-shaven face, framed in long gray locks, under a cloth cap in the fashion of Louis XI, inspired respect by its placid gravity. His slow, heavy step could be heard on the road as he went silently to his work, whereas the plowmen, exchanging greetings as they passed one another, urged on their beasts with shouts, held them back with oaths, or brightened the day with love songs. Presently, they would be turning over their furrows, still shouting, still swearing, and still singing, followed by the feathered host, to whom the plowshare furnishes inexhaustible feasts. During this, Six Cents, at the foot of the trestle, gazing upward open mouthed, without sound, his attention centred upon not departing from the straight line, would stretch to full height with arms extended, then stoop to the ground as if to touch it, bend over only to lift himself, and lift himself only to bend again.

And what of the interludes between work hours? There is the cheer of the coarse but comforting repast, with the zest of its thin, sourish white wine "warming to the heart"—the walk from work to food and from food to work; sleep, when strength is spent, and rising when it would be pleasant to go on sleeping. On Sundays, there is first and foremost the joy of doing nothing, then there are the heavy

conversations during which no one has anything to say, each having no interest in any but his own case, "feeling only his own ills," as the popular saying has it; there is the talk about the weather, the tedium of an idle day, occasionally the diversion of rural debate on the church square after mass; there is communion with the blessed bottle, substituting a paradise of dreams for the irksome reality of things. What further?

Married in a purely animal sense, as is the case with the majority of the human race, Six Cents lived in the relation of male to female with his "good wife," finding in marriage the advantage of partnership in labour. Were they faithful to each other? In a village these matters, which create so much commotion in the city, have small importance. People are too close to nature to resist the attraction of the moment. And I cannot see that the dwellers in cities set them such a shining example. The distraction of fairs is unknown to the sawyer who has nothing to sell. Thefts are too common, crimes too rare, they are not common subjects of conversation. Finally, to satisfy the rudimentary urge of idealism, there are politics and religion, represented by the mayor and the priest. From the pulpit fall incomprehensible words to which no one pays attention, since no one can see that they have any real effect upon anything whatsoever. Religion consists principally in believing that we must by means of certain

ceremonies get on the right side of a God who will otherwise burn us up. At the approach of death one tries to get the balance in his favour at all costs. But this changes nothing in the conduct of life. Local politics are in general, as they are everywhere, a matter of business. The calculation can quickly be made as to the value of a vote on one side or the other. There is no other problem. This is how a great many Frenchmen still express the "national will" concerning the most important matters of politics and sociology. The point ever present to the mind is the question of remuneration. But the conditions determining the wages of labour escape the power of analysis of such fellows as Six Cents. What can they do but say "I work too much and earn too little," and stop, amazed before the insoluble puzzle.

One day, however, Six Cents heard news, when he happened to complain that "Boards did not find as good market as they used to." He was told about pines, and water power, and sawmills in Norway, and cheap transportation, a tale which he did not entirely understand, but from which he gathered that the evil was irremediable. He therefore resigned himself as he had always done, bowing under the inevitable. He earned less and still less, while working harder and harder because of arms grown weaker, and back grown stiff with the years. In spite of the kindly advice of philanthropical political economists,

Six Cents, wearing out his body by continual labour, had no savings. He had no old sock filled with gold pieces against a rainy day, such as the simple like to believe in. Why economize, when one knows that a lifetime of pinching would lead to a ludicrously inadequate result?

Old age is upon him. Pitiless progress has done its work. Humble village craftsmen like Six Cents are out of date. The concentration of capital demands the mustering of labourers in the all-devouring factory. Six Cents looks on without understanding, without complaining. He has come to poverty, want. Utter destitution as he nears the grave seems to him but one fate-ordained calamity more to throw on the heap with the others. Is any one surprised at heat in summer and cold in winter? We must accept things as they come, and if nothing comes, still be content, since we cannot change the actual course of things. It is the same resignation as that of beasts under the whip. Six Cents' wife with a sack on her back goes from door to door begging for a crust or a few potatoes, grudgingly given to her. The sawyer does such small odd jobs as he finds to do. They keep alive, and at times appear contented. Seated on a stone at the threshold of his hut, Six Cents watches the world go by. The young come, merry, wilful, noisy. The aged pass, dejected, resigned, silent.

"With all the boards I have sawed," said he, the

other day, "it will certainly be strange if four cannot be found to make my last home."

The history of a man without a history I have called this. But even without events, without passions, without desires, without revolts, without search for better things, and with the apathy of life-long labour directed to no end, is it not still a history? The evolution of human society cannot be denied. But the time seems distant when men shall keep abreast in their progression. Up to the present time, what a lot of laggards! Consider the mental development of the cave man, chipping his flint, polishing his stone axe, sharpening his arrows, dividing his time between hunting and fighting, defending his hearth with vigilant effort, and trying to destroy the hearth of his neighbour, and then tell me whether the wretched man who spends all the days of his life sawing the same board, hammering the same iron-bar, turning the same crank of the same machine all day long—whether this man is intellectually superior to the cave man? All this, of course, must change. Let us, in order to help on the good work, take account as we go of the temporary conditions of human kind.

FLOWER O' THE WHEAT

XVIII

FLOWER O' THE WHEAT

FLOWER o' the Wheat was the prettiest girl in my village. Tall, well set up, stepping along with a fine self-confidence, she brightened by her clear laughter the fields, the woods, the deep road cuts of the Vendée. With the first warm days of spring the milky whiteness of her skin would be dotted over with a constellation of freckles.

The peasants used to say: "The good Lord threw a handful of bran in her face."

Bran and flour, it would seem, for her face under the sun's rays remained as white as if dusted over with the powder of bolted wheat. Hence, perhaps, her surname, or possibly she owed it to her red hair, matched rather unusually by tawny eyes. She gave one the impression of being all of the beautiful gold-brown tone of ripe wheat. Flower o' the Wheat was beautiful, and knew it because she was told so all day long.

The man of the fields is not by a long way insensible to beauty. His esthetic sense is not the same as ours. He is not moved by a line, a contour,

the grace of a moving form, but he is powerfully affected by colour, as are all whom civilization has not overrefined. Flower o' the Wheat being a creature of living colour, had, therefore, the pleasure of hearing herself proclaimed fair, and of having to fend off the playfulness, and occasionally the somewhat robust caresses, of manly youth all the way from Sainte Hermine to Chantonay. Plant a flower wherever you will, there the bees will congregate. Wherever you meet beauty, you will see men coming to forage, with eyes and hands and lips. Between city and country there is only a difference of setting.

As her fame spread beyond the borders of the canton, Flower o' the Wheat had a throng of admirers such as had not been seen for many a day in our neighbourhood. The pride of it shone in her eyes, dazzled by their own attractiveness, and if she had been told of Cleopatra on whom was centred the gaze of the world, it is not certain that she would have thought the Egyptian queen had an advantage over the country maid. For which I praise her, for enumerating a multitude of adorers is a foolish pastime. Moreover, the queen was dead and the peasant girl alive: the best argument of all.

The delightful part of the story is that Flower o' the Wheat, while permitting herself to be admired by every man, and envied by every woman, kept her heart faithful to the friend who had known how to

win it, in which she differed notably from Cleopatra. Now, that friend, for I must finally come to my confession, was none other than your humble servant. I may be pardoned the pride of that avowal: I loved Flower o' the Wheat, and Flower o' the Wheat entertained sentiments for me which she was not in the least loth to exhibit. I used to follow her about the fields with her dog, "Red Socks," so called because of his four tawny paws, and while the flock browsed very improperly beyond the limit set by the rural guard, I told her all about Nantes, where I had spent the winter. I amazed her with tales from my books, or else she talked to me about animals, what they did, what they thought; she told me extraordinary stories. Our souls were very near to each other, I will not say the same of our hearts, for the sad part of our love was, alas, that she was twenty and I was six—or seven, if I stood on tiptoe. This did not make it difficult for either of us, however, to hug the other. It was only later that I realized my misfortune.

Our best days were at harvest time. The abominable smoke of the threshing machine had not yet invaded the countryside. The flail was still in use. At dawn, men and women divided into groups would begin the round of the threshing floor, their motions accompanied by the rhythmic thud of the wooden flail, muffled by the straw on the ground; one half of the quadrille would slowly retreat, while

the other half gradually advanced. The necessity for attention, and the sustained effort, obliged them to be silent. But what a reaction of laughter and song when the wooden pitch forks came into play, stacking the straw! Noonday would see the ground strewn with harvesters taking their rest in the full glare of the sun, for the peasant fears the treacherous shade. Upon the stroke of a bell, the noisy concert of the flails would again fill the air on every side.

At evening there were dances, and there were songs, in which Flower o' the Wheat excelled. She knew every song of that region, and would sing in a nasal, untutored voice, delicious to the rustic ear, ingenuous poems, in which "The King's Son," the "Nightingale," and the "Rose" appeared in fantastic splendours, joyful or sad. A local bard had even made about Flower o' the Wheat, a somewhat free and outspoken song in dialect, the refrain of which said that the flower of the wheat surrenders its grain under the harvester's flail. Flower o' the Wheat without false shame celebrated herself in song, and there were fine jostlings if some young fellow jokingly made believe to put the refrain into action.

Sooner or later, Flower o' the Wheat was bound to come under the harvester's flail. And here I call the reader's attention to this story, whose merit is that it is the story of everyone. I know of no greater error than to suppose that extraordinary adventures are what make life interesting. If one looks closely, one

finds that the truly marvellous things are those which happen to us every day, and that duels, dagger thrusts, even automobile accidents, with accompanying hatred, jealousy, betrayed love, and treachery, are in reality the vulgar incidents in the enormous drama of our common life from birth to death.

To bring, without any will of our own, our ego to the consciousness of this world, be subject to a fatal concatenation of joys and sorrows dealt by the hazard of fortune, and end in the slow decay which brings us back to the condition preceding our existence, is not this the supreme adventure? What more is needed to make us marvel? Some, who are called pessimists, accept it with a certain amount of grumbling. Others, regarded as optimists, consider their misfortune so great that they eagerly add to it, by way of consolation, the dream of a celestial adventure which everyone is free to embellish as much as he pleases.

Flower o' the Wheat did not bother her head with any of this. She was twenty, a more engrossing fact. She listened to the voice of her youth, like the women gone before her, as well as those who will follow her on this earth. In the fields, nature being so close, people are very little hampered by the more or less fantastic social conventions, which undertake to regulate the human relations between two young creatures hungering and thirsting for each other.

A special sort of cake called "*échaudé*" is the

chief industrial product of my village: a cake made of flour and eggs, very delectable when fresh from the oven, but heavy, and cause of a formidable thirstiness, by the time it has travelled through the bracken as far as Niort, La Rochelle, or Fontenay. Its transportation is carried on by night, in long carts drawn by a horse whose slow and steady gait rocks the slumbers of the driver and of the woman who accompanies him to preside over the sale of the cakes. These carts are terrible go-betweens. The scent of fern is full of danger. The two lie down to sleep, side by side, under the open sky. They do not always sleep, even after a long day's labour. The market town is far away. The unkindly disposed and censorious are shut within their own four walls. Temptation is increased by the jolts that throw people one against the other. Wherefore resist, since one must finally surrender?

Flower o' the Wheat, who was in the service of a rich dealer in *échaudés*, one fine day married her "master," after having given him, to the surprise of no one, two unequivocal proofs of her aptitude for the joys as well as duties of maternity. Her neighbours in the country will tell you that there was nothing out of the ordinary in her life. Her husband beat her only on Sundays, after vespers, when he had been drinking too much, and she took no more revenge upon him than was necessary to show outsiders that he did not have the last word.

I saw her again, at that time, after a fairly long period of absence. The handful of flour and bran was still there. Her eyes had kept their lustre, and her hair still blazed under the fluttering white wings of her coif. But her glance seemed to me sharper, and already the curve of her lips betrayed weariness of life. Her pretty name still clung to her, but the flower had lost its bloom. She still laughed, but she no longer sang. Fortune had come to her, as rings and brooches and gold chains attested. On Sundays she wore a silk skirt and apron to church, and carried a gilded book, a thing found useful even by those who cannot read, since it gives them the satisfaction of exciting their neighbours' envy.

My visits to the village had become brief and far spaced. We had lived very far apart, when I met her one day, in one of our deep road cuts, leading her cow to pasture. An old, wrinkled, broken, worn-out woman. We stopped to chat. Her husband was dead and had left her with "property," but the children were pressing her to make over everything to them. They would have an allowance settled on her "at the notary's," they said.

"I shall have to make up my mind to do it," she ended with a sigh. "Will you believe that my son came near beating me yesterday, because I would not say yes or no?"

Ten more years passed. One day, as I was going through a neighbouring hamlet, a tumble-down

hovel was pointed out to me and I was told that "the Barbotte" was ending her days there. Flower o' the Wheat was no more. She was now "the Barbotte," from her husband's name, Barbot.

I entered. In the half light, I could see, under the remnants of an old mantle, the shaking head of an aged woman, with a dried-up, shrivelled parchment face, pierced by two yellow eyes wherein slumbered the dim vestiges of a glance. A neighbour told me all about it. The children did not pay the allowance, which surprised no one. It was the usual thing. From time to time, they brought her a crust of bread, occasionally soup, or scraps of food on Sunday, after mass. The old woman was infirm, and waited on herself with difficulty. A servant was supposed to come and see her once a day. Often she forgot.

"Why not make a complaint?" said I, thoughtlessly.

"She spoke, one day, of letting the notary know. They beat her for it. And who would be willing to take her message? No one is anxious to make enemies. Her children are already none too well pleased that any one should enter the hut. They do not want people meddling with their affairs."

During this talk tears were shining in the blinking yellow eyes. "The Barbotte" had recognized me.

"Don't be troubled on my account," she said in a thin voice that betrayed the fear of being beaten. "I

need nothing. My children are very kind. They come every day. Maybe you are like the rest, sir, you think I find time heavy on my hands. Do you know what I do, when I am here alone? I sing, in my mind, all the songs of long ago. I had forgotten them, and now they have come back to me. All day I sing them, without making any noise. *I sing them inside.* One after the other. When I have finished them all, I begin over again. It is like telling my beads. It is funny, is it not?"

And she tried to smile.

"*Monsieur le curé* scolds me," she took up again. "He wishes me to say my prayers. But I have no sooner started on the prayers than back come the songs. I cannot help it. You remember, don't you, 'The King's Son?' Oh, the 'King's Son!' And the 'Nightingale?' And the 'Rose?' I want to sing one for you. Out loud, instead of in my mind. Which one? 'Flower o' the Wheat!' Flower o' the Wheat! Ah. . . ." She seemed on the point of singing, but dropping from it, exclaimed: "The flail of the harvester came. The grain was taken. Nothing is left but the straw . . . and that badly damaged. It was threshed too much. . . . Dear sir, you who know everything, can you tell me why we come into this world?"

"I will tell you another day, my dear friend, when I come again."

But I never went back.

JEAN PIOT'S FEAST

XIX

JEAN PIOT'S FEAST

WITHOUT examining the question whether life is sad or gay, without attempting to say which is right, the groaning pessimist or the optimist singing hymns of praise, one may be allowed the remark that a great many people encounter between birth and death a great deal of trouble. Conspicuous among them is the multitude of wretches who from morning until night wear themselves out in ungrateful and monotonous labour for which they receive just enough to enable them to continue wearing themselves out without rest or reward.

The "fortunate ones of the world," those whom the others call fortunate because they are safe from cold and hunger day by day, readily believe that men bowed all their lives in the slavery of labour can no more than beasts of burden feel the cruelty of their fate. It is, in fact, a great aid to optimism to believe that the small allowance of worldly good which some of us can get along with, though we feel our share insufficient, is not paid for by a corresponding amount of worldly evil at the other end of the

divinely instituted social scale. In so far as he thinks at all, the peasant entertains the same idea about the animals, whom he uses without forbearance, and beats unmercifully, satisfied with the argument that "they cannot feel anything." As for him, what exactly does he feel in connection with the good and evil of life? In looking for an answer one should discriminate between the peasant of the past and the peasant of to-day, who in a vague way has been developed by military service, emancipated, not very coherently, by the primary school and universal suffrage, to say nothing of the railroads.

When I look at the peasant of to-day, and compare him with the one I knew in my youth, I realize that a breach has been made in the impenetrable hedge that once closed his horizon. I do not know whether he is happier or less happy. He has come into relation with the rest of the world; that is the chief difference. I do not say that he personally has even a dim conception of things in general. I do not believe he asks himself any troublesome questions concerning the universe. But how many inhabitants of cities are like him in that respect? Schools have remained a place where words are taught. Barracks teach obedience and discourage thought, agreeing in this with *Monsieur le Curé*, who exacts blind faith, to the detriment of reason, that instrument of the devil. Finally, the right to vote, which makes of men with such poor preparation the sovereign arbiters of the

most important social and political questions, the right to vote so frequently reduces itself to a simple matter of business or local interest, that the least daring generalizations are beyond the understanding of the average peasant.

So it happens that despite the daily advance of civilization the countryman continues to lead an elementary kind of life, knowing little of society save his obligation to pay taxes, finding nothing in life beyond the necessity to work without sufficient remuneration to provide for inevitable old age. His distractions, his pleasures, he finds in the Church, in fairs and the shows attached, in markets and the drinking appurtenant, with interludes of amorous expansion which will be granted to the veriest slave by the harshest master, interested in the continuance of a servile caste.

It is true that aside from the joys of thought our average citizen, even with theatres and music halls, attains to no higher pleasures. To eat, to drink, to go out of their way to strip love of the dreams and idealism which make it beautiful, these, when all is said, compose the everlasting "life of pleasure" of our most assiduous "racketers." As love among peasants is unhampered by idealism, the countryman has the two other diversions left him, eating and drinking, which few mortals hold in contempt, as anybody can see.

My friend Jean Piot, who for many years honour-

ably occupied in broad sunlight a position between that of beggar and labourer by the day, or "odd jobber," was never one of those good for nothings who grumble over their task. In the wood yard he would do double work without flagging. On the other hand, he would have been ashamed of himself had he not taken as his legitimate reward an equivalent ration of "fun." Puritans, turn away your heads! Jean Piot, after his enormous share of work, exacted remuneration from Providence, in the shape of joys.

In his youth, labour and joy went hand in hand. If the pay was not large in spite of the excellence of the work, neither, on the other hand, is the expense large, when a kiss only asks for a kiss in return, when the soup of beans, cabbage, potatoes, and the bacon to go with it, are plentiful, when the white wine demanded by the labourer with sweat on his brow is grudged him by no one. Jean Piot had no trade, or rather he had all trades. He was equally good as digger, teamster, herdsman, or plowman, he took as much pleasure in all toil connected with the earth as if he derived strength from it for his revels.

Then old age came. Jean Piot performed fewer prodigies, and when he did the work of one man only, the master rebuked his laziness. He had encumbered himself on the way with a certain Jeanne, whom public opinion reproached with having put the two or three children she had had before her marriage into a Foundlings' Home—she was re-

proached, that is to say, with having estimated that the Republic would provide better than she could for their maintenance and education. The sin is not one for which in the opinion of the village there is no remission. Jeanne having become "the Piotte," showed no less ardour for work and no less love of good cheer than did her legitimate spouse. But her best days were already past. Illness overtook her. There were no savings. Jean Piot, who still caroused, was now no better than an ordinary workman, and sometimes complained of stiff muscles, though he continued to drive them beyond their strength.

Then came stark poverty. Alas! if the ability to work had diminished, hunger and thirst, more pressing than ever, had not ceased to claim their dues. Jean and his wife asked first one favour of their neighbours, then another, and when they had worn these out they applied to their friends, finally to strangers. Thus they passed by a scarcely perceptible transition from salaried pride to resigned beggary. Jean Piot and his Piotte were well thought of, never having had the reputation of being sluggards. They had, to be sure, led a merry life, fork and glass in hand. But which of their fellow labourers had never been tempted to drown care in the cup? People helped them without too bad a grace. From time to time they still worked when an opportunity came not out of all proportion with their

strength, sapped by work and disease and white wine.

Slowly, age increased the inconveniences of being alive. In spite of all, the two seemed happy, unmindful of the humiliation of begging,—or sometimes even taking without having begged—accepted by all as established parasites, always ready to lend a hand if there were pressing work. It is not certain that, counting fairly, the collected gifts falling into Jean Piot and the Piotte's scrip amounted to more than an equitable reward for services rendered.

However that might be, no one seemed to complain of the state of things brought about by the natural course of events, when a strange rumour came from the county town. Jean Piot had inherited, it was said, inherited from an unknown great uncle, who had "had property," and left to his numerous relatives the task of dividing a "considerable" sum among themselves. At this news, Jean Piot held up his head, and the Piotte, going about with her crutch, asked for alms with a braver front. Public opinion could but be favourably impressed by the great news. Everybody's generosity suddenly increased, to the satisfaction of both parties.

"Well, and those potatoes that I offered you the other day? You did not take them, my good woman—you must carry them home." The Piotte could not remember anybody mentioning potatoes, but she trustfully took whatever was offered. From all

sides gifts poured in, along with congratulations on the wealth to come, which was to raise the Piot's from the dignity of beggars to the higher functions of the idle living on the labour of others. The news soon received confirmation that an inheritance there was, of which Jean Piot was a beneficiary. Whether large or small, no one knew.

The heirs were said to be numerous, and the most contradictory reports ran on the subject of the division. Jean Piot said nothing except "perhaps," or "it is not impossible," which gave small satisfaction. Everyone knew that he had been to see the lawyer, and that he had seemed happy when he came home. The law does nothing quickly. There was a long period of waiting, but public generosity did not weary, and Jean Piot and his Piotte had easily fallen into the way of being received as "the Lord's guests."

Finally, the news burst upon the community that Jean Piot had inherited 500 francs, all told. The disappointment caused a violent reaction, and from one day to the next, the couple found everywhere resisting doors and frowning faces. But Jean Piot seemed not to notice them, and before long his look of pleasure and his expressions of satisfaction gave rise to the idea that there must be something more than appeared. "We do not know the whole," people whispered, and each, to forestall the unknown, entrenched himself in a position of benevolent neutrality.

Five hundred francs was after all something, and as no one supposed that Jean Piot intended to make a three per cent. investment, many wondered if they might not draw some small advantage from the inheritance.

"Jean," said the maker of wooden shoes, "your shoes are a sorry sight. I will make you a pair, cheap, if you like."

No representative of commerce or industry but came with offers of obliging the "heir" with bargains in his wares.

Jean Piot shook his head, with gracious thanks. That was not what he wanted.

Presently it was *Monsieur le curé's* turn.

"Jean Piot, do you ever give thought to your soul?"

"Why, of course, *Monsieur le curé*, I am a good Christian, I think of nothing else."

"Well, and what do you do to save your soul from the mighty blaze of hell? I never even see you at mass."

"That is no fault of mine, *Monsieur le curé*, I have to earn my living. You know very well that I go to the church door. On Sundays people are readier to give alms than on week days."

"You should not work on Sundays."

"No danger. I can't work any more. Begging is not work."

"Do you know what would be a good thing to

do? You ought to have masses said, to redeem your sins."

"There's nothing I should like better. Will you say some for me?"

"Good. How much will you give me?"

"How much money? Does God ask for money, now, to save me from hell? Why, then, did he not give me money to give him?"

"Hush—wretched man——! You blaspheme! Have you not just inherited?"

"Ah, you mean those five hundred francs? Wait a bit, *Monsieur le curé*, you shall have your share."

"You will have masses said?"

"No, I have not enough for that."

"But for the small sum of twenty francs, I will say——"

"Impossible, *Monsieur le curé*, it is impossible."

"You grieve me, Jean Piot. You will die like a heathen."

"I wish you a good day, *Monsieur le curé*."

When this conversation was retailed, everyone wondered. What! not even twenty francs to the Church? Jean Piot surely had some plan. What was he going to do?

Soon they knew, for without solicitation orders began to be placed with the best tradespeople. Jean Piot had engaged and paid for the largest stable in the village. Tables were being set up in it,

and covered with a miscellaneous collection of dishes, as if for a Camacho's banquet, such as was never seen outside of Cervantes' romance.

The two village inn keepers had received gigantic orders for food and drink. And Jean Piot, his eyes sparkling with pride, went with a kindly smile from door to door, no longer to beg, but to let everyone know that "in remembrance of their good friendship" he was going to treat the entire countryside for three days. Saturday, Sunday, and Monday there was feasting, junketing, merrymaking—and everyone invited! There were cauldrons of soup; cabbage, potatoes, and beef at will, and fish, and fowls, and cakes and coffee. As for wine, casks of it were tapped, and it was of the best; on top of that, little glasses of spirits, "as much as you liked."

Amazement! Exclamations! Certainly Jean Piot was an extraordinary man. It was perhaps unwise to spend all that money at once, when he must necessarily be penniless on the day after. But who was there to blame him, when everybody was taking his share of the feast? Only the *curé* shook his head, regretting his masses. But public opinion was set in Jean Piot's favour, and not even the Church could swim against the stream.

At early dawn on Saturday Jean Piot and the Piotte settled themselves in the middle seats at the table of honour, and the crowd having flocked thither in their best attire, fell upon the victuals,

and washed them down with generous potations. At first they were too happy to speak, but how everybody loved everybody else! How glad they were to say so! On all sides handshaking—on all sides affectionate embraces—on all sides cries of joy! And for Jean Piot and his Piotte, what kind and laudatory expressions! What admiration!

During three days the enormous festival took its tumultuous course, amid the muffled crunching of jaws, the gurgling of jugs and bottles, mingled with laughter and shouts and songs. Women, children, old people—everyone gorged himself immoderately. When evening came, young and old danced to the music of fiddles. The church, alas, was empty on Sunday, and when the *curé* came to fetch his flock—God forgive me!—they made him drink, and he, enkindled and set up, pressed Jean Piot's two hands warmly to his heart. All the mean emotions of daily life were forgotten, wiped away from the soul by this great human communion. Tramps who were passing found themselves welcomed, stuffed to capacity, beloved—— And when the evening of the third day fell, not a soul was there to mourn the too early close of an epic so glorious. The entire village, exhausted, was asleep and snoring, fortifying itself by dreams to meet the gloomy return to life's realities.

When his heavy drunkenness was dispelled, Jean Piot realized, for the first thing, that the Piotte's

sleep would have no awakening. Congestion had done for her. He had on the subject philosophical thoughts to which he did not give utterance for fear of being misunderstood. In the depth of his heart he felt that neither of them had any further reason for living, since they had fully lived.

And so, when, left alone, he saw gradual oblivion close over the imposing revel of which he had been the hero, when the current of life swept ever farther and farther from him that tiny fraction of humanity which made up his universe, when countenances darkened at sight of him, when doors closed and when he was reproached with having "wasted his substance"—he was not surprised, and without a murmur accepted the inevitable.

For days and days he remained stretched on his straw, quiet, even happy, it seemed, but without anything to eat. He starved, it is said.

Two days before his death, the *curé* had come to see him.

"Well, Jean Piot, my friend, do you repent of your sins?"

"Oh, yes, *Monsieur le curé!*"

"You remember when I proposed to say masses for you? If you had listened to me, you would not to-day be suffering remorse."

"And why should I suffer remorse, *Monsieur le curé?* I have done no harm to anybody. You see, I quite believe that the next world is beautiful,

as you say it is, but I wanted my share of this world. And I had it. Rich people have theirs. It would not have been fair otherwise. Ah, I can say that I was as happy as any rich man, not for so long, that is all. And what does that matter, since it must end sometime anyhow? Do you remember? You drank a glass, and you took both my hands, just as if I had been a rich man, *Monsieur le curé*. We were like two brothers. If you cannot say a mass for me without money, surely you will remember me in your prayers, will you not?"

"I promise to, Jean Piot," said the *curé*, who had grown thoughtful.

THE TREASURE OF ST. BARTHOLEMEW

XX

THE TREASURE OF ST. BARTHOLEMEW

ST. BARTHOLEMEW is a village in the Creuse, whose exact location I abstain from indicating lest I disturb a peaceful community by calling up unpleasant memories. St. Bartholemew is a village like any other. It has its main street, with old sagging houses huddled one against the other; here and there, the discordant note of a new building with wrought-iron gateway and gateposts topped by cast-iron vases. There are streets running at right angles, oozy with sewage, littered with manure, where numerous chickens scratch for their living. There are little gardens ornamented with bright shiny balls, reflecting people and things, and making them look ugly at close range, beautiful in the distance, even as our eyes do.

As far as I have ever been able to judge, the inhabitants of St. Bartholemew differ in no wise from those of other villages. There, as everywhere in the world, people are born, they live, and they die, without knowing exactly why, and without arriving at any reasonable explanation of the strange event. They seem, however, quite untroubled by the diffi-

culty of the problem. When they come into the world, their first business is to lament. All their life long, they lament over the labour involved in preserving their lives, but when it comes to dying, they cannot make up their minds to it without lamentation! What bonds hold them so closely to earth? Although "gifted with reason," they could not tell you. What do they see beyond the fatal impulsion which sets men at odds in a fierce struggle for life, the results of which seem uncommensurate with the effort expended? They have no idea. Man comes into collision with brutal fact, and can see nothing beyond a conflict of interests. Three persons there are, having a direct action upon him: the *curé*, the mayor, and the rural guard, whose injunction will bring him to court.

The *curé* is the purveyor of ideals appointed by the government. His church, with its pictures, its gilded candlesticks, its tapers, and its anthems, constitutes the only manifestation of art furnished by the powers. It provides, in addition, a body of doctrine, texts, and uplifting admonitions, the misfortune of which is, that although everyone repeats them, no one pays any attention to them. The practice of the cult seems to be the important thing. As to the precepts of which that same cult is the support, everyone applies them to suit himself. Gifts of money, a mechanical deathbed repentance, set the sinner on good terms with the Master of the Be-

yond. With regard to the common events of life, Lourdes and St. Anthony of Padua will attend to them for a consideration.

As the *curé* fills the office of God's mayor on earth, so the mayor and the rural guard are the *curés* of that far-away terrestrial divinity called: "the Government." What, exactly, that word means, no one has the necessary learning to explain. All that is known (and nothing further is required), is that it is a mysterious power, as implacable as the Other, and that one cannot even acquire merit with it by offering one's money willingly, for it has liberty to force open doors and drawers and take at its convenience. No one loves it, by whatever fine name it may call itself, for it has, like the Other, a court of demons, a fierce company of bailiffs, attorneys, judges, and jailers, cruel and vindictive toward poor people who have the misfortune to displease it. This conception of the social order may not express a very elevated philosophy, but it has the great advantage of being exactly adapted to the tangible realities of daily life.

If it were objected that at election time the "sovereign (!) voter" might feel that he himself is the Government, I should answer that he does not feel it for the simple reason that it is not so. To make it true, an understanding of things and conditions would be necessary, which the law may presuppose, but which it has not so far been able to bring about,

either among the people, or, for the greater part, among the delegates of the people. Promises, of course, have not been wanting, but what has followed? One is put in mind of a flock of sheep, given their choice of tormentors, and as the personal interest of each, clear and conspicuous, comes before the incomprehensible "general interest" (a Pandora's box, concealing so many things!) the representative whom it is good to elect is the one who will tear up the greatest number of legal summonses and substitute for them the greatest number of office holders' receipts and tobacconist shops.

It will be admitted, I fancy, that the spiritual condition of St. Bartholemew, as shown in all this, does not greatly differentiate it from the rural communities known to each one of us. The special attribute of the place, aside from its excellent *curé*, and no less excellent mayor, was that it boasted a "fool." To be sure, St. Bartholemew's was not the usual village fool. He was not one of those fantastic creatures in novels, who, happening on the scene at the right moment, save the virtuous maiden, and bring the villain to punishment before he has carried out his dark designs. No. He was a thickset dwarf, with a bestial, twisted face, whose peculiarity was that he never spoke. "Yes," and "no" formed his entire vocabulary. This viaticum was, however, sufficient to ensure his worldly prosperity, given his notions of prosperity. His mother, who had been

something of a simpleton herself, and whom the birth of the dwarf had firmly established in the character of a "witch," had had him, she said, by a passing travelling salesman. The adventure was in no way novel, but the appearance of the dwarf caused the more superstitious to believe that her travelling salesman travelled for the house of Satan!

This might have prejudiced the community against "Little Nick," as the simpleton was called, had he not been gifted with more than ordinary muscular strength, which impelled him to hurl himself with hyena howls upon any one refusing him a bowl of soup, or straw to lie on in the stable. Beside which, a strange lust for work possessed the diabolically gnarled body. Hard physical labour was joy to Little Nick. He worked gladly at any occupation whatsoever, even showing rudiments of art as a carpenter or a blacksmith, which had given rise to the suspicion "that he was not as stupid as he wished to be thought." But as he worked for the love of it, and never demanded payment, he was universally judged to be an "idiot," which did not keep the farmers from contending for his favours.

The mother lived "from door to door," begging her bread. People gave to her chiefly from fear of her "casting an evil spell" upon them. But Little Nick was everywhere received with open arms. A piece of bread and three potatoes are not extravagant pay for a day's work from a man, and Little

Nick was as good as two men. From time to time he was given an old pair of trousers, or a torn waistcoat, when his too-primitive costume might have disgraced his fellow workers; on winter evenings he had his place in the firecorner and good straw to sleep on in the stable smelling of the friendly beasts.

The legend ran, I must add, if I am to be a faithful reporter, that Little Nick had sometimes taken shepherdesses unawares in thickets or rocky solitudes. The victims of the "accident," if there had really been any such, made no boast of it, and the dumb boy was impeccably discreet. It is certain that Little Nick cast upon rustic beauty tender glances which made him more grotesque still. Young women ran from him with grimaces of disgust and cries of horror which he did not resent. The young men were more reserved, out of respect for his formidable fists.

Everything considered, Little Nick was one of the happiest among mortals, practicing without effort the maxim of the wise, which is to limit one's desire to one's means, and conceiving no destiny finer than that with which a kind Providence had fitted him. And what proof is there that his fellow citizens in St. Bartholemew were mentally so very superior to him? Was it the part of wisdom to seek, or to despise, money? The entire village was engaged in a bitter struggle for gain, and the hardest worker rarely escaped want in old age. Little Nick

worked for the sole pleasure of using his strength, and without any effort of his the rarest good fortune befell him.

The witch having been found dead one morning, was expedited to the cemetery with a more than usual perfunctory recommendation from the Church to the Saints in Paradise. Little Nick, who had been sent for, found half a dozen neighbours in his hovel "taking stock" of his property. He was looking about the empty place without a word, when a chest being moved aside, a stone was exposed to view, which had every appearance of having recently been lifted. A spade inserted under the edge disclosed a hoard of gold: a very burst of sunshine. With a single cry, all hands were outstretched. But the warm emanation of the metal, inflaming the desire of all, had also waked up Little Nick. With three blows he had thrust everyone aside, with three kicks he had emptied the house. Half an hour later, the entire village stood in front of his locked and bolted door, waiting for the miracle that must issue from it. The gossips, surrounded by the gaping populace, made their report: "A great hole full of gold! How much could there be? Ten thousand francs, at least," said some. "Twenty, thirty," declared others.

"It would not surprise me if there were 100,000," opined one old woman.

"And then, we did not see what might be under other stones——"

"It must be the Devil's money," said the sexton.
"I wouldn't take it if it were given to me."

"Nor I," said another.

"Nor I."

"Nor I."

Everyone disdainfully refused what was not offered him.

"All the same," said a peasant, "I am his nearest relative, I am his guardian."

"You are not!" said another, "It is I who am his guardian!"

And the discussion was soon followed by a quarrel, concerning a relationship which no one had ever before thought of.

Presently the door opened, and Little Nick appeared.

"Good morning, Little Nick, it is I, your good friend Pierre."

"No, it is I, Jean, you know me, I am your uncle."

"No, it is I, Matthew, you remember that good soup I gave you. Come with me. You shall have a big piece of bacon."

"Come with me!" "Come with me!"

What a lot of friends! Little Nick growls with anger, and energetically motions them all to be gone. They obey, each meaning to return later.

On the following day, the many "guardians" betake themselves to the justice of peace to explain matters, and lay claim to their "rights."

The magistrate comes.

"Little Nick, you have some gold pieces?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me where you have put them?"

"No."

They rummage everywhere, and find nothing. Little Nick has spent the day in the woods. Doubtless he has buried his treasure there. They will follow him and discover his hiding place. They must wait until then.

But already the "guardians" are wrangling over Little Nick, who does not know which to listen to. The cleverest among them suggests his unloading a cart of manure for him. That means pleasure. Little Nick runs to it, and having finished his task finds himself seated at the table before a dish of bacon and cabbage, beside his new cousin "Phemie."

Phemie is a blonde. Phemie has blue eyes. Phemie has fresh, rosy cheeks, and large caressing hands with which to fondle her "dear little cousin," promoted to the dignity of "Nicholas." The "guardian" obligingly retires after supper, leaving the two "cousins" to make acquaintance. Phemie pours out a glass of a certain white wine for "Nicholas."

On the following day the acquaintance has progressed so well that Nicholas has no desire to leave. He has found his real guardian. Evil tongues are busy, but Phemie holds on to Nicholas and will never let go.

"Have you some beautiful gold pieces?" she sometimes whispers in his ear.

"Yes."

"Will you tell me where they are?"

"No."

But this "no" is feeble, and when Phemie adds: "If you don't tell me, I sha'n't love you any more," Nicholas, by an expressive dumb show lets it be known that above all things he wishes to be loved.

Months pass, and years. Little Nick lives in an ecstasy of bliss. His pleasure in work is less keen. But evidently he has compensations, for the fair Phemie is always with him. It is now five years since the witch rendered up her soul to the Devil. Not a day has passed, not a night, without Phemie questioning Little Nick about the treasure. The "Beast's" resistance has weakened to the point that when the "Beauty" asks him: "Will you show me where the gold pieces are?" he now answers "Yes."

"Come, let us go," says Phemie, redoubling her caresses.

Little Nick motions to her to wait, but sometimes he takes a few steps in the supposed direction of the treasure, and Phemie is convinced that she will soon finally wrest from him the secret of the undiscoverable hiding place.

It is high time, for the woods around St. Bartholemew are incessantly being searched by the villagers, and if Little Nick does not make up his mind to

speak, Phemie may be the victim of "thieves," for the gold pieces are hers, are they not? She has surely earned them! Already, as soon as a peasant buys a piece of property, everyone wonders whether he may not have found the St. Bartholemew treasure.

Finally Phemie has an idea. She has noticed that when she accompanies Little Nick on his walks he avoids the river. She leads him thither, saying: "Let us go and have a look at the gold pieces."

Mechanically, Little Nick says "Yes" and obediently follows her.

When they have reached the wildest spot, "Is it here?" asks she, pointing at a cavity among the rocks, covered over with bushes.

"No," says Little Nick.

"Up there, then," she pursues, pointing at a sharp rock by the water's edge.

"Yes."

"Come."

And both of them, helping themselves with feet and knees and hands, torn by the brambles and jagged edges, climb the steep slope to the top.

"There?" breathes Phemie, panting.

"Yes."

And Little Nick, lying flat, hanging over the abyss, extracts from an invisible hole in the rock, where it makes a straight wall to the river, a handful of gold pieces, which he flings, laughing, at his beloved.

There is a frightful scream. Phemie, mad with

rage, rises like a fury lusting for vengeance. The gold pieces are pasteboard, ironical gift of the traveling salesman to the "witch," to overcome her last resistance, and heritage of Nicholas, from which, it cannot be denied, the "simpleton" has drawn his profit.

"Beast! Beast!" shouts Phemie, foaming at the mouth.

And as Nicholas tries to rise, she pushes him over the edge. He loses his balance, but clinging to Phemie's skirt, drags her with him.

The river is deep in that spot. Neither of them could swim.

Their bodies were found at the foot of the rock, and the pasteboard gold pieces scattered on the summit, whence their footprints showed that they had fallen.

"A trick of the Devil!" said the peasants.

And there was, to be sure, something in that.

A HAPPY UNION

XXI

A HAPPY UNION

THERE are happy marriages, whatever novelists say. There are married couples who love each other, and live happily together to the end of their days. The conditions of this happiness, the circumstances of this harmony may not always, perhaps, be such as one solely interested in the esthetic aspects of society might advocate. But what can we do? For many centuries there is no virtue but the loftiest minds have commended it to the world with arguments as attractive in form as they have been sublime in purport. And have they changed us? What is the history of the past if not the history of to-day?

There are happy unions. There are unions middling happy. And there are unhappy unions. "I alone know where my shoe pinches," said a celebrated American, when congratulated upon his happy home. Men or women, great numbers can say the same, for Providence seems not to have cared to shoe us all according to our measurements. Our subsequent behaviour is the important thing. Advice on this point is not lacking, which is not surprising, since

we have expressly entrusted to a corps of celibates the direction of domestic life, and the instruction of man and wife separately in the most secret details of a relation which, by his very profession, the instructor cannot practically know.

The authority of this advice being all that gives it interest, each takes as much of it as he sees fit, and goes on doing what he pleases. One cries out and the other is silent. One philosophically resigns himself to limping all the way to the grave. Another prefers amputation and the hope of comparative comfort with a wooden leg. Who is right and who is wrong? Let him decide who has attained certainty in such matters. As for me, all I dare affirm is that it is easier to theorize than to prove, considering the variety of the problems and the complexity of the psychology in which their solution might be found.

Let me, by way of example, briefly sketch the history, as simple as it is true, of the happiest couple I have ever known. I will admit that it is not a tale proper for publication in a Manual of Morals. Rarely do bare facts, unembellished by fiction, authentically illustrate precepts which we are more inclined to advocate than to follow. The sole merit of this tale is that it is true, from first to last. I leave out nothing and add nothing. I knew the people. I kept them in sight all along the hard road that led them from crime to perfect conjugal felicity.

I am not attempting to prove any theory. I am telling what I have known and seen.

Adèle was a handsome girl according to country esthetics. Large, strong, of brilliant colouring, with a mop of tangled red hair and iron-gray eyes which never dropped before those of any man. She helped her father, Girard the fishmonger, to carry on his business. In a lamentable old broken-down cart, behind a small, knock-kneed horse, who knew no gait but a walk, Girard would set out at nightfall for Luçon, the large town, and come back in time to sell his fish before midday. Immediately upon arrival, the fishmonger, his wife and their children, each loaded with a basket of shell fish, mullet, sole, and whiting, packed under sticky seaweed, would disperse over the village, the outlying hamlets, the farms, and peddle their wares.

This trade entails much travelling about and seeing many people. Bold, and pleasant to the eye, Adèle was welcomed everywhere. No speech or behaviour from the country lads was likely to fluster her. Peasants, who are no more obtuse than city men, have long since recognized the value in business of an agreeable young person to attract trade. Any country inn that wants to prosper must first adorn itself with a pretty servant. There is everywhere a demand for beauty. For lack of anything better, men will philosophically fall back upon ugliness. Life takes upon itself to accommodate almost everybody.

Adèle, not being one of those young women who are only chosen when there is scarcity, early became the blessing of her family. The fish in her basket seemed to leap of its own accord into the frying pan, although the pretty wheedler took pride in selling it at a high price. Any chance meeting on the road furnished occasion for selling her wares. Often a kiss was added as a premium. Occasionally something more. What she lost or what she won at this game would to-day be hard to reckon. On Sunday, at the fair, she exhibited herself in fine attire and ornaments: these were her profit. Her name ran from mouth to mouth accompanied by tales to which public malice did not always need to add lies: this was her loss. But far from being disturbed by the "*chronique scandaleuse*" she insolently gloried in it, declaring that the hard-favoured meddlers would have been altogether too happy had she found a chance to talk scandal about them.

"When they are done tattling, they will stop," she used to say.

Which proved true. So that one day, when there was nothing else that Adèle could do to astonish people, the report spread that she was about to become the legitimate wife of Hippolyte Morin, the shoemaker. I must add that the event was accepted by all as a decent ending to a tempestuous youth.

"He will certainly beat her," thought the women, when they saw Morin's infatuation.

“He will not make a troublesome husband,” said the men, as they looked at the sallow and weakly though choleric shoemaker.

Public approval was therefore unanimous. The circumstances of the marriage were simple. Girard owed Morin 500 francs, and could not even manage to pay the interest on them. Seeing his creditor prowling with smouldering eyes about the stalwart Adèle, he had proposed to him to marry the girl and give a receipted bill, and the shoemaker, overjoyed at the thought of possessing such a marvel all to himself, had gladly closed the bargain. As for Adèle, she had said yes without difficulty, as she had to so many others. Hippolyte owned land. He was a good match.

They had a fine wedding, and for a full half year happiness appeared to reign in the new establishment. Six months of fidelity were surely, for Adèle, a sufficient concession to *Monsieur le Maire's* injunctions. Presently lovers reappeared, to Morin's lively displeasure. Adèle was thrashed, as the public had foreseen. The muscular young swains none the less made game of the husband, at best a puny adversary, as public opinion had equally foretold. The worst of it was that the unaccommodating shoemaker had a way of watching his rivals with a vicious eye, while drawing the sharp blade of his knife across the whetstone. No one in a village is afraid of kicks and blows. But no one likes the

thought of steel coming into play. And so, when the belief was established that Morin would some day "do something desperate," the ardour of the followers began to abate. They gradually dropped away, and it was Adèle's turn to experience the fiercest resentment against her sullen lord.

Three years passed in quarrels, in hourly battles. There were no children. Grass does not grow on the high road, as Michelet observes. One morning the news ran that Morin was seriously ill, then that he was dead. On the day before, he had been playing bowls without any sign of ill health. The doctor who had been sent for, shook his head gravely, and asked to speak to Adèle in private. At the end of the interview the bystanders noticed that Adèle kept out of sight, while the doctor, without a word, poured the contents of the soup tureen into a jug, and carried it away in his gig. That evening, two gendarmes came to arrest "Hippolyte Morin's wife," accused of poisoning her husband. Conversations in the village were not dull that evening.

The inquiry was brief. Bits of the blue shards of cantharides floating among the bread and potatoes in the soup permitted no denial. Adèle confessed that passing under an ash tree, and seeing some of those insects lying dead in the grass, she picked them up, "to play a joke on her husband." Later on, after she had been instructed by her lawyer, she

said that the aphrodisiacal properties attributed to the beetle gave the obvious reason for the matrimonial "joke." But it being proved that her extra-conjugal resources in that line were rather calculated to foster a desire to rid herself of an inconvenient husband, the story gained small credence. Morin, who had not consented to die, was the only witness for the defence.

"Of course it was a joke," he repeated, stupidly. "The proof of it is that she had told me."

"And you deliberately took the poison?"

"As long as it was a joke, of course I did, your Honour."

The jury, which readily absolves husbands for a too prompt use of the revolver in the direction of their wives, always shows itself resolutely hostile to women who attempt to rid themselves of their legitimate master. Two years' imprisonment were considered by the representatives of social order a just retribution for Adèle, as well as a practical incentive to virtue in the home.

Morin returned to his shoes, grieving over his long separation from Adèle.

"All that was our own affair," he said. "What business was it of the judge's?"

And many shared his opinion. A lot of noise about a "joke!" Adèle was too good hearted a girl to have aroused any deep hatreds. As long as Morin defended her, why should others hurl obloquy?

Husbands looking at their wives, and wives at their husbands, mostly refrained from comment. Morin, furthermore, sure, now, of his wife's fidelity for at least two years, poured himself out in eulogies of the great Adèle, and declared that he had often been in the wrong.

"To whom did she ever do any harm?" he would ask everyone that came along.

"Not to me!" "Not to me!" all would answer.

The man had received the gift of a lofty philosophy or rather, he had a dim feeling that from all this "fuss" a great good might result from his wife and for himself.

"When she comes back," he would say, "it will not be as it was before."

"Surely," replied the others, "a little bad luck gives one a lot of sense!"

"Two years, that is not so much," answered Morin, who was counting the days.

Meanwhile Adèle was silently sewing shirts, and vaguely dreaming. It would never have occurred to her to complain. She even found a certain contentment in this quiet after the agitations of her youth. She tranquilly awaited the release which would take her back to her friendly village, and to that good Morin who loved her, and whom she loved, too, in spite of all "the judges had done to cross them," as she said after her trial. From the very first day, Morin placed to the account of the prisoner

all the money permitted by the regulations. But she rarely touched it, and when, on his visits, he urged her to spend it:

"I need nothing," she would say. "Keep it for yourself, my man. You must not be ailing when I come out of jail."

And this allusion to the past made them both laugh in great good humour.

Finally the day of liberation came. Morin, as you would know, was on the spot to fetch his wife. They flew to each other's arms, laughing aloud, for lack of words to express their joy. It was Sunday. Adèle and her husband reached home just as mass was over. In a twinkling they were surrounded by the crowd, and acclaimed like conquerors. There was mutual embracing and shedding of happy tears, and asking of a thousand absurd questions from sheer need to talk and show how glad they were to see one another again. Upon arrival at her house Adèle found the table spread; at this, twenty guests sat down to celebrate her return with proper ceremony. A grand feast, which lasted until daylight. At dessert, friends came in, and merest acquaintances, too, swept along by the current of universal sympathy. Bottle after bottle was emptied. There was a great clinking of glasses. The women kissed Morin, and the men Adèle. Never in their lives was there a more wonderful day.

And yet, from that time forward, good days

followed one another without break. Adèle remained gay, easy, and approachable, quick in the uptake of broad jests, but Morin had her heart, and never was word or deed charged to her account which could have given umbrage to the most suspicious husband. Her spouse, proud of his conquest, tasted the joys of a well-earned happiness.

They were during forty years the model of a perfect match. How many of the people around them, with an irreproachable past, could boast an advantage so rare?

A WELL ASSORTED COUPLE

XXII

A WELL-ASSORTED COUPLE

THEY were not good. They were not bad. They had neither virtues nor faults of their own from never having done or said anything except in conformity with what others were doing or saying. Never had it entered their minds to desire anything on their own initiative. Nothing had ever made them reflect upon themselves, and take a decision according to an idea, whether good or bad, that was the result of their own individuality rather than "established opinions."

He had been born into the cork business. She had seen the light of day in the Elbeuf cloth trade. The arrest of a lawyer, unable to return several millions to the people whom he had deprived of them, united their parents in a common expression of indignation against impecunious embezzlers. In court, under the eyes of the Christ who bids us forgive, and amidst the encouragements of avenging law, cork and wool came together to destroy the unfortunate lawyer whose activities were proclaimed criminal because lacking the success which would have made his reputation, for integrity. The cork merchant and

the cloth merchant, both of them noisy about their small losses, conceived a "high" mutual "esteem," which subsequent acquaintance converted into "friendship."

The heir to corks was twenty-three years old.

"A good sort of boy," said his father.

He was, as a matter of fact, soft, flabby, and spiritless.

The cloth heiress had just completed her twentieth year.

"The sweetest child!" bleated her mother.

The truth being that the girl's inertia took the impulsion of any movement near her.

They were married after magnificent promises on both sides of the house. It later appeared that the manufacturer of corks was on the verge of failure, and that the cloth business had long since gone into the hands of a partner. As the fraud was reciprocal, there could be no reproaches on either side. They remained "good friends," and from the remnants of past splendour collected a small capital with which to set up the young couple in the linen draper's business at Caen.

The two young people, who were equally well fitted to manufacture butter or deal in building stone, by scrupulously adhering to the rules and regulations established for them, made a decent income from their business. Their parents died, rather fortunately, before becoming a burden and

after inculcating into them those principles of public and private morals which would enable them to reach the end of their career without disaster. They had two daughters whom they married off, one into "ribbons," the other into "hardware," while they themselves died, as they had lived, in "linen."

"Colourless lives," some will remark.

Not everyone can write Hamlet, or discover the laws of universal gravitation. The present order of nature stands upon a foundation of passive beings, whence, from some combination of century-old heredities, springs, now and then, the miracle of genius. What surprises for us, could we examine the authentic genealogies of Shakespeare and Newton, and see from what an accumulation of weaknesses their strength emerged!

The *processus* of any human life is, in truth, not less a marvel. Only, from our low level we instinctively look toward the heights. And there is no denying that the psychology of St. Francis of Assisi is more interesting than that of the ordinary mortal. Still, if one examines closely, one finds that the "great man" is not different in substance from the little man: the principal difference is that in the two cases the forces are differently related. Infinite are the transitional types between the two extremes, and all are worthy of analysis as human samples capable of furnishing, according to circumstances

of time and place, acts which would remove them from common mediocrity.

What events would have been necessary to raise our two linen drapers into the light of glory I cannot say. I should like to believe that a great tragedy, public or private, might have called forth some act of sublime devotion on their part, and made them illustrious in history. But I will not conceal that nothing in their speech or actions ever authorized such a hope.

I speak of them because I met them on my path in life. I found it entertaining to observe them as curious specimens of the class of human beings whose passive mentality is close to that of beasts of burden, and who yet are fairly remarkably individualized in the deep recesses of their inner life. Cattle have, without any doubt, ideas at the back of their heads, as is proved when we see the drove by tacit agreement divide among themselves the task of watching all points of the horizon, while with half-shut eyes they ruminate in the fields where nothing now threatens them—which performance is a reminder of the days when the great carnivorous enemies might at any time unexpectedly come down upon them. Still, they know but one law, the goad that drives them to the plow or to the shambles. Bovine man taking his part, with or without reflection, in a more complex life, develops, in addition, despite the weight of his mental inertia, a considerable ca-

capacity for emotion, for personal activity outside of the rules of action imposed upon him by society, whether through its laws or its customs.

The two linen drapers of Caen, seen in the street, had the commonplace appearance of the millions who make up the ordinary stock of humanity, which is, in fact, what they represented. The chief trouble with professional psychologists is that, the better to classify them, they insist that men are all alike. It is not surprising that salient points in character should be the first to strike the observer. The deep-seated traits of "indeterminate" personalities are, however, worthy of analysis, being, by the way of hereditary combinations, the productive source of characterized energies.

Who will not have concluded from the social passivity of this couple, stupefied with "linen," that a corresponding somnolence prevailed among their inward activities? Yet these two amorphous creatures, who had unresistingly taken the imprint of surrounding wills, lived a life of their own, remote from the public eye, and felt seething in the depth of their being intense, at times even violent, passions, which made both the charm and the torment of their days.

Buying and selling linen had become like a physiological function of their organs. Eating, drinking, sleeping, and dealing in linen, were all on the same level in their minds. Both man and wife instinc-

tively loved money, "because one needs it in order to be honest," they used to say, "honesty," to them, meaning keeping out of prison—but neither had even the moderate initiative which would have increased their chances of becoming rich. After reaching a medium degree of success in their business, they stood still, evenly balanced between indifference and cupidity. Outside of laws and customs, the opinion of the trade kept them straight, like a steel corset. They went to church because "it is customary." They even gave to the poor if someone were looking, as do so many other charitable Christians. Then, when the doors were closed, and their "young ladies" safely bestowed in the Convent of Mercy, where they had been placed for the sake of "fine connections, useful in the future," they could finally devote themselves to each other.

I said that they were neither good nor bad, meaning that they were as incapable of useless malice as of disinterestedness. But the fact that a moral tendency is not expressed in action does not make the tendency any better. In deference to the requirements of law and "social propriety" the pair lived indissolubly united. There was no breaking of marriage vows. The model wife was really a figure too far from esthetic to inspire a temptation of a guilty thought in even the most abandoned of men. Besides, all her activities were centred, conformably with the precepts of the Church and the

Code, upon her "legitimate spouse." As for the faithful husband, he at all times abstained from "sin," whether temporary or permanent, for the peremptory reason that the "crime" was forbidden by law, as well as doctrinally "condemned by morality." Thus held in check by external barriers, there remained for two souls so virtuous nothing but to be absorbed in each other, and to seek in the intimate contact of their respective susceptibilities the satisfaction of an ideal compatible with their natures. This satisfaction was not denied them. It was not to be found in love. They found it in a powerfully concentrated hatred. When it is the dominant emotion of a life, execration, in a heart convulsed with impotence, may afford the full amount of violent sensation by which an inferior order of humanity is reduced to replacing the joys of love.

Husband and wife hated each other voluptuously, hated each other with a crafty ferocity always on the alert to inflict more exquisite wounds. And for what reason? They had perhaps never attempted to disentangle it. A mutual disgust had come upon them in the very first days of their marriage, upon discovering the double deception of the non-existent marriage portions. Later on, it is true, they both resorted to identical methods for decoying sons-in-law; they had none the less taken pleasure, from the beginning, in secretly calling each other thieves. As, furthermore, each had a very lively sense of the

other's inferiority, they mutually despised each other for the conspicuous inertia which succeeded only in holding its own in the business, by the balance of irresolution in their will.

If they could have found the courage occasionally to discharge the overflow of wrath that gathered in the depths of their mean souls! But the effort involved with giving free course to the mounting flood of a repressed detestation was outside of their possibilities. All they had capacity for was silently forcing back the desire to insult which contorted their lips, thus aggravating the repressed rage whose seething constituted the bitter zest of life. A passion too mighty for their weakness, impotent to control it.

Unable to expend in speech the accumulating strength of their hatred, they found in secret acts of aggression the only remaining outlet. How much more satisfying than idle words was the joy of injuring each other—outside of business, of course. When thus employed, they knew what the object was of their living! They felt in those moments the power of the bond that united them in the only passion for the satisfaction of which they were necessary to each other.

The details of the petty warfare with which they opened hostilities would fill a volume. There was, at the beginning, a series of light skirmishes in which the first thrusts might have seemed due to chance, had not the one who received them recognized them

as hurts he would have liked to deal. The kitchen furnished excellent occasions for feminine attack. Too much salt or pepper, tainted meat, cold soups, were common occurrences during the early days. It would happen on this particular day that Madame was not hungry, while Monsieur had a good appetite owing to the more than frugal preceding meal. Monsieur was not, however, defenceless. Madame had a "delicate chest," and dreaded draughts above everything. But she was obliged to get used to them and resign herself to coughing, for by incredible ill luck there was always a door that would not close, or a broken window pane, which obliged her to live in a perpetual whirlwind. To balance matters, when caught in a shower, Monsieur would find his umbrella broken and come home chilled through. Each cared to excel in the game. They invented a thousand complicated traps requiring careful preparation. One night, Madame, alone in bed, had her legs scalded by the stopper suddenly coming out of the hot water bottle. Monsieur regretted the "accident," for he had to do double work in the shop while Madame uncomplainingly awaited recovery. A short time after, Monsieur, jumping out of bed, cut his foot on a piece of glass. It was his turn to limp.

So they continued, vying with each other, and increasing in efficiency. Madame seemed to have a weakness for the elder of her two daughters. Monsieur preferred the younger. A fine battlefield,

where each could stab the other through the innocent victim. The two marriages afforded occasions for subtle persecution, which ended in the common regret of feeling so good a weapon slip from the tormentors' hand.

Left alone, face to face, the two, having exhausted their whole arsenal of perfidy, stared at each other in the stupor of a paroxysm of hatred that made them powerless to renew their warfare. What was to be done? Something must be thought of. Madame was the first to hit upon it. Monsieur, suddenly taken with a violent colic, passed in one night from life to death. At the last moment he had a suspicion. A smell of matches was exhaled from the decoction he had been taking. He blew out the candle, and saw phosphorescence in the glass. In the same moment death throes convulsed him with excruciating pain. He could only point out to his wife the damning evidence, with a single word, accompanied by hideous laughter.

"The guillotine! the guillotine!"

He died repeating it. Mad with terror, Madame fainted. She never regained consciousness. The terrifying name of the engine of death fluttered on her lips with her last breath.

The tragic beauty of this ending excited the admiration of the entire town.

"How they loved each other!" people said. "Such a well-assorted couple!"

LOVERS IN FLORENCE

XXIII

LOVERS IN FLORENCE

THE question of love and marriage has manifestly the most obsessing interest for humankind. Presumably dissatisfied with the actual experiences of life, men, women, old people and young, seek in fiction, in dreams, the unattainable or the unattained. Life passes. Those among us who, on the brink of the grave, question themselves honestly, recognize that more chances of happiness were offered them than they, fickle or wavering, made shift to grasp.

Our excellent ancestors of the "lower" animal order have a fixed period for the joys of love, and even in monogamy, as I demonstrated in the story of my pigeons, do not pride themselves upon a "virtue" beyond their power. The chief feature of the "higher perfection" to which we aspire, in word if not in deed, seems to be that we are condemned by it to an hypocrisy born of discrepancy between the ideal and our ability to realize it. Marriage, when considered aside from its doctrinal aspect, is found to be a fairly effectual pledge against the straying of the imagination which is the forerunner of human

weakness. To protect the weak, that is to say the woman and child, against the caprice of the strong, is assuredly the duty of society. But who will claim that marriage, as the law has instituted it, and as custom practises it, performs that office, and does not oftener than not result in the triumph, whether just or unjust, of man? Have we not heard, in the discussion of the divorce law, one of the chiefs of the "advanced" party lending his eloquence to the furtherance of the doctrine of indissoluble marriage, while a famous radical argued that there was no equality between the adultery of the husband and that of the wife, when viewed as a conjugal misdemeanour justifying final separation?

The mistake lies in regarding as immutable, and acting upon it as such, a thing that is, in fact, the most unstable and variable in the world, viz.: the human being, in perpetual process of change. To ensure the durability of a union for that lightning flash which we pompously term "all time," the parallel development of two beings would be necessary, two beings whom differing heredities in most cases predispose to the most fatal divergences. One must admit that the chance of it is small.

I discussed this topic, only a few days ago, with a charming woman, made famous throughout Europe by her art, who has with the greatest dignity practiced that free bounteousness of self which men audaciously claim as their exclusive prerogative.

She ingenuously maintained that the act which men consider of no consequence when practised by themselves has no importance either in the case of woman, except in the event of maternity.

“And,” she said, “men take advantage of this iniquitous law of nature, adding to it a corresponding social injustice which leaves us no choice except between ‘honour’ and liberty. Fortunately life is mightier than words, and women who are not by nature slaves will always have the resource that masculine vanity has so foolishly made attractive by making of it forbidden fruit.”

“You assert, then,” I suggested with a certain timidity, “that all women worthy of the name either do or should deceive their husbands?”

“Oh, my assertion is merely that most women if deceived by their husbands have the right to give back what they get. As for those who are unfaithful to a faithful husband, I see no reason for your refusing them the initiative you grant to the man who goes out on pleasure bent while his chaste wife sits at home spinning her wool, and wiping her children’s noses.”

“That is practically what I said; that any woman with self-respect——”

“——has the same rights as the man without self-respect——”

“——and should use them——?”

“——and may use them to suit herself without the least shadow of remorse.”

“Complete liberty, then, for each to be unfaithful to the other.”

“Proclaim this maxim or not, the world has not waited for you to formulate it before putting it into practice.”

“You think, then, that in reality most women are unfaithful to their husbands?”

“I think that in reality most men are unfaithful to their wives—and their mistresses, too, as soon as the wife or mistress expects anything from duty, even though unwritten duty, instead of the free attraction of sentiment or of the flesh. I believe that most women who are unfaithful to their husbands are unfaithful to their lovers under the same circumstances, that is to say as soon as the lover imposes himself by the rights of—morally—a husband, if the combination of words is admissible. Worse than that! As fast as odious habit changes lover into husband, and mistress into wife, the actual husband, who was the lover in the first days of marriage, and the actual wife, who was the legitimized mistress upon leaving the church door, regain the ascendancy.”

“Too late.”

“Not always. Stop and think. Women more or less deceive their lovers with their husbands. That is classic in happy homes.”

“So one hears. But how can one be sure?”

“How many cases I might quote to bear me out! Shall I tell you a case I have recently known?”

“Pray do.”

“Very well. Last month in an Italian city——”

“Florence, naturally, I notice that you frequently go there.”

“Yes, Florence. A friend of mine, a painter, went there to live three years ago, with his wife, a woman who would not perhaps be called beautiful, but who is really full of charm and grace. When my travels bring me in their neighbourhood I never miss an occasion to see them, for we are very old friends. He and I, you see, were young together for six months. He tells me everything, and I tell him many things. Philip, we will call him that, if you like, made a love match which, as it happened, was excellent from a worldly standpoint, too. They were the most utterly devoted couple for nearly four years. That is a long while. Eighteen months ago, on one of those journeys to Florence which you have noticed, I easily detected that Philip’s wife had a lover. A young fellow, an Italian noble with a great name and a slender purse, beautiful as a young wild animal crouching for game—well dressed, though not as quietly as could be, with a pretty talent for sculpture, which he had the good sense never to mention. Their art had brought the two men together, and Alice—we will take the chances of calling Philip’s wife by that name—had, I do not know exactly how, come under a new attraction, the strength of which increased as time, through the

monotony of habit, blunted the formerly supreme charm of her husband.

“On his side, Philip had gradually returned to studio ‘affairs,’ giving as an excuse his research after forms, attitudes, and colours, during that relaxing of the body which follows the strain of the model’s pose, and is like life after death. He confessed all this to me without reserve, obviously satisfied that his wife, whose ‘angelic sweetness’ and ‘tact’ he could not sufficiently praise—was willing to leave him a free field for his fancies.

“‘I still love her!’ he said, in all sincerity. ‘But I have to think of my painting, do I not?’

“Giovanni, naturally, had a great admiration for Philip’s talent, and made no secret of it. As for Alice, she regarded her husband as nothing less than a genius. When Philip was dissatisfied with his work he was frankly unbearable. He indulged in grumbling and complaining and bursts of anger, followed by long periods of depression. If, on the other hand, he had succeeded in satisfying himself, it was worse still, for then one had to endure the recital of the entire performance, down to the least trifling detail of composition or execution. At first one might listen with pleasure, or at least benevolence. But the wearisome repetition from morning until night finally became tedious, even exasperating, when Philip, with a childish insistence, invited replies, denials, the better to confound his opponent. The

docile Giovanni and the sincerely admiring Alice lent themselves resignedly to these gymnastic exercises of patience, but when days and days had been spent in the occupation, both, exhausted by their efforts, must have longed in body and soul for a distraction more or less in accordance with current social customs. As might have been expected, they found it in each other, and from that moment peace descended upon the happy home.

“When I discovered the affair between Alice and Giovanni in the course of a visit to Fiesole, where I came upon them suddenly in such a state of blind absorption that they did not even raise their eyes at the sound of my footsteps, I judged that passion was at flood tide. They did not even trouble to conceal themselves, so that had I not been careful, I should not have escaped the annoyance of an encounter, the revelations of which could hardly have been blinked. I took the course of going often to see Philip at his studio, where he had an important piece of work under way, and I was able to leave town without disturbing the happy quietude of all concerned.

“On my return the following year it seemed to me at first that nothing had changed in the arrangement of which I had the secret. Still, Philip seemed to me less absorbed in his art. I often caught him with his eyes obstinately fixed upon his wife, who, while avoiding them, seemed troubled by the obsession of his gaze. Did he suspect something? I did not

long entertain this idea, for he talked to me with such warmth about Alice, that I could not restrain an exclamation of surprise.

“‘God forgive me, Philip,’ I cried. ‘You are in love! And with your wife! What has happened?’

“‘Nothing’ he said. ‘I have never ceased to love her.’

“And one confidence leading to another, I learned that a flirtation by every rule was going on between the two. For a year they had been living in separate apartments. At first the doors had been on the latch, but later they had definitely been locked. One day, for no particular reason, Philip had wondered why, and found no answer. Alice, when questioned, had had nothing to say, but ‘Not now—later,’ which could not fill the function of reasons. That another should have won the heart which belonged to him could never have occurred to Philip. But as his mind and senses became insistent, sentiment woke up, too. So that the inconstant husband began a definite siege of the unfaithful wife.

“Alice appeared to be flattered by the homage, but held back by a sense of duty toward her lover. As for Giovanni, confident in the stability of his dominion, he was entertained by the performance in which his vanity saw nothing but an innocent game started by Alice for the sake of keeping him on the alert. It was Philip, and no longer Giovanni, who

filled Alice's drawing room with flowers. Giovanni amusingly called my attention to this detail, with the fine confidence of a man sure of his power. He was, after all, fond of Philip, and pitied him for his wasted pains.

"I went to spend six months in Rome, and on my way back to Paris, stopped for a week in Florence. I was convinced at once and beyond a doubt that the legitimate betrayal had been consummated, and that the blind lover Giovanni was being cynically duped. Alice had become her husband's mistress. I must add, that though the factors were inverted, the sum of happiness appeared the same. Contentment continued to reign in Philip's household, as it had not ceased to do since his wedding day, thanks to the three successive combinations. I even judged that this time there was a chance of it becoming a settled condition, for Philip no longer bored us with his pictures, being completely absorbed in the business of making himself agreeable to his wife, for whom the pleasure of the conjugal affair was enhanced by the delicately perverse spice of the secret connected with Giovanni. The value of his conquest rose appreciably in Giovanni's eyes at sight of Philip in love, and he peacefully admired as his achievement the perfect contentment of the household. He was even beginning to cast his eyes about him, and I was not too greatly surprised when I saw him disposed to make love to me. Everybody's destiny was sealed.

The divorce between Giovanni and Alice which, I suppose, already existed in fact, would soon be formally acknowledged.

"I was in the habit of going at nightfall to sit in the Loggia dei Lanzi to see all Florence pass on its way home, for has not the Piazza della Signoria for centuries and centuries been the town's general meeting ground? I have made curious observations there. After a glance at the Perseus, I used to go and sit on the upper one of the steps that make seats like those of an amphitheatre against the long back wall, and there, hidden in the shadow, screened from view by the famous group of the Rape of the Sabines, gaze about me, dream, and wait for chance to send an inspiration or a friendly face to tear me from my thoughts.

"One evening I had lingered in my hiding place. Darkness had come. Ammanati's Neptune and Gian Bologna's Cosimo peopled the night with motionless ghosts. Suddenly two shapes rose under the arches, a man and a woman with arms entwined. They glided whispering toward the Sabine voluptuously struggling in the arms of her new master, and there, out of sight of the rare passers, but fully in my sight, clasped each other in a long embrace. Finally I saw their faces. They were Philip and Alice, who, driven from home by Giovanni's presence, had come to hide in the public square and make love.

"'Giovanni must have been surprised,' Philip was

saying, 'at not finding us in. But really, he is too indiscreet.'

"Do you know what you ought to do?" asked Alice, after a silence, 'You ought to advise him to take a little journey to Rome—or elsewhere.'

"A good idea. I will do so.'

"Two weeks later Giovanni came to see me in Paris, and made amorous proposals to me. I still have to laugh when I think of his discomfited face at the sweeping courtesy I made him. It happened only three days ago. What do you say to my story?"

"I should have to know the end of it."

"Nothing ever ends. Everything keeps on."

"Well, it is an exception, that is all I can say."

"I admit it. But out of what are rules made, if you please? Is it not out of exceptions when there are enough of them? I bring my contribution. You ought in return to tell me some fine story of absolute monogamic fidelity."

"Such things exist."

"Assuredly. I know a case. Never were two mortals more unhappy. Their whole life was one prolonged battle."

"From which you conclude——?"

"That we are all exceptions, my dear friend, and that we all establish our great intangible laws only for other people, reserving the right to take or to leave as much of them for ourselves as we choose. Good luck. Good-bye!"

A HUNTING ACCIDENT

XXIV

A HUNTING ACCIDENT

I AGAIN met the charming woman to whom I owe the story of the Florentine love affairs just related.

“What news of Don Giovanni?” I asked.

“I saw him yesterday, by chance. He confessed that he did not know the reason of his exile. I gently insinuated that the husband might have something to do with it. The idea made him laugh, and he answered: ‘Anything is likelier than that!’ which made me laugh in my turn.”

“All blind, then?”

“And the result: Peace and happiness.”

“And clear vision?”

“Clear vision would simply mean tragedy, because of each one regarding his own infidelities as unimportant, only to reach the unexpected conclusion that those of his partner are unforgivable crimes. Not logical, but very human.”

“And do you not think that conjugal fidelity is human, too?”

“Excuse me, I expressly told you that I had once seen a case of it.”

“And might one hear the story of this solitary case?”

“An uneventful drama. Nothing is less romantic than virtue. You must be aware of that.”

“But does happiness lie in romance?”

“That I cannot say. Possibly, because the reality will never equal the dream. At all events, my faithful pair were the most unhappy mortals I have ever known.”

“Do tell me about them.”

“Oh, it is very simple. You know that I was brought up in England, near the little town of Dorking. I still have friends there whom I visit occasionally, when I want a change from Italy. Surrey is a picturesque region, where lazy rivers wind their way to the sea between green banks, through wide, fertile valleys at the foot of wooded hills. Everywhere woods and streams, and ravines crested with yews and ancient oaks. Pale, misty skies spread a mother-of-pearl canopy over the wide expanses of thick grass. It is a fox hunting country, and I humbly confess that there are to my mind few pleasures in life equal to the wild intoxication of a mad, aimless gallop, in which, what with hedges and ditches, rivers and precipices, one risks breaking one's neck a hundred times a day. You will from current pictures of it get a fairly good idea of the sport. It is a headlong rush to get—one does not clearly know where. Nothing stops one, nothing furnishes a

sufficient reason for turning back. Onward, and still onward! The horses themselves are infected with the general madness. Accidents make no difference. A fallen horse scrambles to his feet again, an unseated rider gets back into the saddle. Some are carried home on stretchers. At night the fallen are counted. In three curt words their friends sympathize with them for having to wait three weeks before going at it again.

“A few years ago, in one of these hunting tumults, I stopped to get my breath after a long gallop on my cob. I was on a wide heath overlooking the valley that ends at the red spires of Dorking. A silvery river, whose name I forget, and a sprinkling of pools set patches of sky in the vast stretch of flowering green. At the horizon a tower is seen, famous in the district, a memorial of the whimsey of a pious personage, who had himself buried there head downward so as to find himself standing upright on the day of the resurrection, when, it seems, the world will be upside down.

“I stood wondering at this ingenuous monument of human simplicity, when I heard behind me the noise of frantic galloping. Before I could move or cry out, a hunter and a maddened horse burst from the wood, within gunshot, and plunged headlong down the steep bank that ended abruptly at the gaping pit of an old quarry. What filled me with unspeakable horror was that the rider was desperately spurring

and lashing his horse, who would have been unable anyhow to stop himself in his dizzy descent toward death. In the twinkling of an eye the ground appeared to swallow them both. Nothing was to be seen but heaven and earth smiling at each other with the imperturbable smile of things that never end.

"I finally regained the use of my senses. I jumped from my saddle, and I know not how, reached the bottom of the quarry. The horse had been killed outright. In a red pool lay a gasping, shattered man. It was an old friend of mine, who had been kind to me in my early days in Dorking. I called him. He opened his eyes.

"'What!' he cried, 'it is not over?'

"I questioned him in vain.

"'It is not over! It is not over!' he repeated in vain despair, 'I shall have to go through with it again!'

"Not knowing what to do or say, I climbed to the top of the bank and called for help. A farmer hastened to the spot. With infinite care, the wounded man was lifted into a cart. By some miracle he had escaped without mortal injury. Two months later he was in full convalescence. He suspected before long that I had witnessed his leap, and my embarrassment when he questioned me about our encounter at the bottom of the quarry only confirmed him in his idea. One day, he could no longer keep from speaking.

““You do not believe it was an accident, do you?” he said, looking me squarely in the eyes.

““What do you mean?” I asked, avoiding the question.

““I mean that I must have passed close by you on my way to the quarry.”

““Yes,” I said, with a sudden resolve to tell the truth.

““You know my secret. I am sure, my dear child, that you will keep it. Death would not take me. I shall go on living. But since there is now one human being before whom I can pour out the overflow of my misery, and since that one is yourself, for whom I have so long felt the warmest friendship, I will tell you all.”

““Some other day. Later on.”

““No, let me speak. In the first place, let me reassure you, there is no crime in my life.”

““What an idea!”

““No, I am merely unhappy. And my unhappiness is of a kind for which there is no help. It seems to you that I have everything, does it not? Wealth, a happy family life, beloved children. My wife, I am sure, seems to you——”

““The best in the world.”

““Doubtless. And yet, she exactly is the cause of my wretchedness. She loves me, and I hate her. It is horrible.”

““Oh, come. You do not hate your wife. That is impossible.”

“‘I repeat it. I hate her. I loved her when I married her. I was in love at that time, for she was very beautiful. She has been a faithful wife, and a good mother. What have I to complain of, except that she mechanically has confined herself to the narrow performance of her duties, and while doing it, has allowed us to become strangers? Is she above or beneath me? What does it matter? We are not on the same mental plane. I have by my side an inert, submissive creature, with an exasperating sorrow in her eyes, for although she has never formulated any complaint, she naturally holds me responsible for the misunderstanding which has never been expressed in words. You look at me as if you did not understand. You think me mad, probably. Shall I be more explicit? Very well, I no longer love her. There you have it in a nutshell. Gradually, habit and her flatly commonplace mind made her indifferent to me. There is no sense in blaming her. Be the fault hers or mine, I was estranged from her. What remedy was there for the brutal fact? I had loved her, and I loved her no longer. We cannot love by order of the sheriff or of the Bible. It is as if you should reproach me with having white hair instead of blond, as I once had. What have you to say to it?’

“‘Nothing at all, my dear and unhappy friend. If you wish me to speak frankly, the idea had occurred to me that the lack of pleasure you took

in your excellent wife might come from the possibly unconscious pleasure you took in someone else.'

"Your imagination anticipates the facts. As you suspect, I have not finished my story. Since you call for an immediate confession, let me tell you, that having been strictly brought up in the discipline of the Church, I came to marriage with the perfect purity required by Christian morality. Let me also tell you that, for whatever reason you choose—ignorance of the strategy of intrigue, or timidity, or fear of losing my self-respect—I have remained guiltless of the least departure from the strictest marriage laws. I no longer loved my wife, but I was her husband, her faithful husband. You will readily guess at the wretched lapses into weakness confessed in that statement, followed by a reaction of shame, and even of repulsion, which in spite of my best efforts I could not disguise.

"I thought of going on a long journey. A year or two in India might, or so I supposed, have brought me back to the woman from whom proximity was daily separating me more widely. But she, not understanding this, raised the most serious of all objections: the children needed my oversight.

"Take us with you,' she stupidly suggested.

"The die was cast. We remained where we were: chained together, each horribly distressing the other, and, with each spasm of pain, deepening our

own hurt and that of our companion in irons. She, unfailingly angelic, and I, unbalanced, full of whims, and doubtless unbearable. Who knows? If it had been possible to her nature, a clap of thunder might have scattered the contrary electric currents between us, and have restored peace. But no. We were enemies always on the point of grappling, with never the relief of a word or a gesture of battle. My nerves were on the point of giving way, when the inevitable romance came into my life.'

"'You are still far from strong. Do not tell me any more to-day.'

"'Nay, chance has forced this confession. Let us go through with it to the end. After this, we will never refer to it again. The romance you have guessed at was connected with a lovable and light-hearted girl. She was a little intoxicated with her own youth, and full of the exquisite charm which illusion had once lent to the woman I married, and in which she was to me so lamentably lacking now. What shall I say? I loved and was loved. Our passion was an ideal one, very sweet, very pure, carrying with it no remorse. Were I to tell you the story of it, it might even seem childish to you. It contained, however, the two happiest years of my life. Two years that passed like a flash. Two years of silent delight, ending one day in a definite avowal. No sooner had we uttered the words, than fear of the sin we glimpsed assailed us, and we fell

back aghast into the depths of despair. Our only kiss was the kiss of eternal farewell.

“‘I was left more broken and bleeding by the horrible fall than when you found me on the stones of the quarry. She went away, and if I am to tell the whole miserable truth, she has found comfort, she is married to a boor, who, they say, makes her happy. Why should I care to appear better than I am? I often regret the imbecile heroism prompting me, when to save that shallow creature I made myself into the victim of an atrocious fate. I spared her, and consequently am dying, while she, in the arms of her hod carrier—— Do not misjudge me. I have suffered. She had sworn to love me forever. She is happy, and I—I who could have taken her and broken her and made of the eventual harm to her an overwhelming joy, while it lasted, have not even the right to proclaim her unworthy of my foolish pity. I curse her, and I love her still.

“‘And my wife, my blameless wife, who guessed everything, I am sure, and forgave it, either from incapacity to resent an outrage, or from insulting pity for me, my wife to whom I owe this double disillusion in love, who unwittingly tortures me, and whom I equally torture, I execrate her, I hate her with all the intensity of my misery. Had I yielded to the moment’s temptation I might have returned to her sated with happiness, or disenchanted, or remorseful.

“In my deepest misery I shall never forgive her the look of silent anguish wherewith she stabs me. I shall never forgive her resignation, the quiet submission which, together with her interest in her duties, makes our tormented life bearable to her. She is not unaware, you may be sure, that I have a hundred times thought of seeking oblivion in death. She was no more taken in than you were by the accident on Dunley Hill. She will never betray it by a word. She offers herself as a sacrifice, and this magnanimity which fills me with despair constantly aggravates the intolerable anguish of our daily association. I no longer love the woman who loves me; I still love the one who loves me no longer. I have committed no sin, I am even blameless. Will you deny that if I had given myself cause for remorse I might also have suffered less, might have even had chances of happiness?”

With a far-away look in her eyes, the narrator ended her story abruptly.

“And what did you answer?” I questioned.

“I answered that pain wears itself out no less than joy, that it is our nature to regret the things that might have been, because they are so different from reality. I answered that patience to live is the greatest among the virtues.”

GIAMBOLO

XXV

GIAMBOLO

I TOO, have known the joys of travel! I, too, have left the easy slopes of home for the steep ascents, of foreign lands! Like many another simpleton, sated with the familiar, I have enthusiastically crossed frontiers in search of that something or other which might give me unexpected sensations.

After being tossed and jolted and bruised in the hard sleeping cars, I have fallen into the hands of porters, or "*traegers*" or "*facchini*," who bewildered me with their violent pantomime accompanied by anti-French sounds, obliged me to follow them by going off with my wraps and bags, and after an extortionate charge flung me on to the sympathetically dejected cushions of the hotel omnibus, amid strange companions. Next, a hideous rattling of iron and window glass, while a gold-laced individual asks me simultaneously in three different languages to account for my presence here, and say how I mean to spend my time, telling me in the same breath the great advantage there would be in doing something quite different from what I intend to do. Presently the torture changes. A gigantic porter in an

imperial great coat transfers me to silent automata in black broadcloth and white tie, who hand people and luggage from one to the next as far as the elevator. Nothing more remains but to answer the chambermaid's investigations as to my habits and tastes, my theory of existence, while by an error of the hall boy my luggage is scattered in neighbouring rooms, and I am burdened with someone else's. All is finally straightened out. Alone, at last!

Then comes a discreet knock at my door. It is the interpreter, the guide, the cicerone, the indispensable man, who with touching obsequiousness places his universal knowledge at my disposal for to-day, to-morrow, or all time. Here follows a long enumeration of what custom imposes upon the stranger. There is no question of breaking away from tradition. There stand the monuments, and here are the roads leading to them. One may begin the round by one or another. My liberty is limited to the order in which I shall see them. The rest does not concern me. Here is such and such a picture, there stands such and such a piece of statuary. We shall cross the street or the square where such and such an event took place. A date, the year, and month, and day, are supposed to stamp the facts on my memory. Why did the men of the past choose this precise spot to make history? I have no time to inquire, for in three turns of the wheel I am in another and still more memorable place, where other

dates and other names are dextrously driven into the quick of my memory. Galleries follow upon galleries, trips to rivers, to mountains. A glimpse of a cool garden tempts me. How sweet to rest there for a while, and dream! But where is one to find the time, when interpreter and coachman are growing impatient because there is no more than time to go to the Carthusian monastery, and get back before nightfall?

The interminable road unfolds before me while I delve into my Baedeker for the history of the monastery. Suddenly the coachman stops, points with his whip at the horizon, and makes an emphatic, incomprehensible speech. A battle was fought there in the time of the Risorgimento. His little cousin's brother-in-law was wounded there, not mortally, though his corporal had his leg cut off. How should one not be proud of such memories? My guide says that his father was fond of telling that he had seen it all from the top of a tower. He begins another version of the story, which is interrupted by our arrival at the monastery, and taken up again on the return journey. Next day in the train I shall have leisure to think over all these things, if the complete confusion in my memory leaves me capacity for anything but stupefaction.

When we try to get at the reason for these extraordinary performances, people offer different explana-

tions. This one will call it "taking a holiday." The other will say that he has had an unhappy love affair and needs distraction. For the most part, people will confess that they are trying to forget something—their wife, their children, their business. All seem tormented by the same desire for novelty. What they are seeking from men and monuments and places in foreign lands is something not yet seen, a fresh enjoyment, a virgin impression which shall draw them outside the circle of outworn sensations. It is something to rouse a happy wonder, and fulfil a hope of pleasure that always keeps ahead of any pleasure experienced. Do they find it? Everyone must answer for himself. Many probably never ask themselves the question, lest they be obliged to confess a weary disappointment.

Before this procession of churches, statues, and pictures, where shall we stop, what shall we try to retain? How shall we disentangle the significance of things, the meaning and power and expressiveness of which can only be grasped by deep study? It would be too simple, if one need merely open one's eyes in order to understand. The work of art speaks, but we must know its language. Not only is time wanting, knowledge of the need of knowledge is wanting in most passers by, who will never do anything but pass by. Their pride is satisfied when they can say: "I have seen." That is the most definite part of their harvest of pleasure. It is

apparently a conscientious scruple that obliges them to go out of their way to obtain it.

"I am going to Rome," said a young Englishman to Miss Harriet Martineau, "oh, just so as to be able to say that I have been there."

"Why don't you say so without going?" was the simple reply.

It is upon Italy particularly that the crowd hurls itself. Wherever you may go in that classic land, you will be surrounded by an ever-rising flood of the natives of every known continent, all seeking under new skies for self-renewal. Silent, tired, their eyes straining at invisible things, they file past with their shawls and veils and parasols, levelling field glasses, marking maps, asking senseless questions, and emitting exclamations expressive of an equal admiration for everything they see. I have always pitied these poor people, dragged from their native land by a force which their simple minds are unable to analyze. They will never express their disappointment, most of them will never realize it. But I feel it for them, and I pity their wasted effort.

It was a consolation to me to find one day that there are people who turn homeward satisfied, with the object of their desires attained, and the happiness secured of having seen and felt what it is granted only to a chosen few to see and feel.

I was quite alone on the platform of the bell tower of Torcello, from which the entire Venetian lagoon is

visible at a glance. Sea, air, and sky, all luminous and transparent, melted into one another, building a vast dome of light. In the distance, bluish spots— islands, or perhaps clouds—what cared I for names! Do clouds have names? Boats loaded with fruit and vegetables streaked the bright mirror of the sea, and alone reminded one of the reality of the earth. Not a sound. The desert calm of sky and sea imposes silence. The lagoon has no song.

I stood there, as if transfixed in the crystal of the universe, admiring without reflection, when lo!—a group of Germans arriving, led by the fever-shaken cicerone whose aid I had a little earlier refused. Here was his chance for revenge. Immediately, without preamble, he gathers his audience in a circle, and begins to “exhibit” the horizon. With outstretched arms he throws at every point of the compass names, and names, and then more names. From the top of the peaceful tower fly sonorous sounds to the spots where his imperious gesture firmly fastens them. Mountain, island, tower, village, indentations of the coast line, everything has its turn, visible objects and objects that might be visible. Men, women, and children, all Germany hangs upon the lips of the voluble showman. At each name, as if at a military command, all glances follow the pointing finger and take an anxious plunge into space. For one must be sure to see the designated spot. Otherwise what is the good of coming?

But as soon as the eyes are settling down to feed upon the sight just announced, a new command drags them all in another direction. That blue line, that white gleam have a name, a history—this is the name, and here is the history. Now let us go on to the next thing.

These people, marvellously disciplined, listen in admiring attitudes. A student is taking notes, so as to impart his learning when he gets home. But the end is not yet. The cicerone, suddenly silent, one hand shielding his eyes, appears hypnotized by something at the horizon. The attitude, the fixed stare, particularly the silence, keep the spectators in suspense. The man has drawn from his pocket a battered opera glass which, possibly, in the last century, contributed to the delight of some noble dame at the Fenice. Its lenses acquire from being dextrously rubbed with an accurately proportioned mixture of saliva and tobacco, and then dried with a handkerchief reminiscent of fish fried in oil, and of polenta, the unique property of making infinitely small objects at the horizon visible—objects smaller than any other optical instrument could enable one to see. The man brandishes the apparatus.

“To-day Giambolo is visible,” he says. “I am going to show you Giambolo.”

Everyone exclaims joyously: “What! Is it possible? He is going to show us Giambolo!”

And the man on the bell tower of Torcello is as

good as his word. Pushing aside the German field glasses with a scornful gesture, he thrusts his precious instrument upon the group.

"Do you see, just above the horizon line, something white that seems to move in a burst of light? Half close your eyes, in order to see farther. By an uncommon piece of luck Giambolo is visible to-day. You cannot help seeing it. I can even see it with my naked eye. But of course I know where to look for it."

The rigid German, ankylosed at his glass, suddenly straightens up.

"Yes, yes, I saw it very well. It is all white, and there is something shining."

"That is it," answers the man of Torcello, satisfied.

Then everyone took his turn. The women all saw it at the very first glance; they even gave detailed descriptions of it. The student alone could not see Giambolo. He confessed it with genuine humiliation, and was looked upon with pitying disdain by all the others.

"What is it like?" he asked of everyone. And everyone gave his own description. There was a slight vapour at the top. A streak at the right, said some, some said at the left; there was nothing of the kind, according to the *pater familias* who had had the distinction of being the first to see Giambolo.

The unfortunate student tried again and again,

and went on exclaiming in despair: "I can see nothing! I can see nothing!"

The Italian shrugged his shoulders with a placid smile, the meaning of which obviously was that some people had not the gift.

"But," cried the exasperated youth, "what is Giambolo, will you tell me? Is there any such thing, really, as Giambolo?"

A unanimous cry of horror went up at this blasphemy. How could one see a thing that did not exist? When half a dozen human beings have in good faith seen Giambolo and are willing to swear before God that they have, no further discussion is possible.

"Then tell me what it is, since you have seen it."

With a gesture the Italian checked all forthcoming answers.

"Giambolo is Giambolo," he pronounced, with imposing solemnity. "One cannot, unless one is mad, argue about it. Only, it is not granted to everyone to see it."

There was evidently on the bell tower of Torcello no one bereft of reason, for silence followed this speech, and no one seemed inclined to dispute a settled fact. Groaning under the weight of his shame, the unfortunate young man who had not seen Giambolo gave the signal for moving on, and the descent was made in the contented repose of mind that attends the happy accomplishment of an act above the common.

On the lowest step, the good Torcellian reaped in his discreetly outstretched cap an abundant harvest of silver coins. It is hardly possible to be niggardly with those who have shown one Giambolo.

A few days later, on the roof of the Milan Cathedral, amid the thick forest of statues which makes the place surprising, I saw a mustachioed guide hurling at the marble multitude augmented by a flock of Cook's tourists the names of the snowy summits composing the Alpine range along the horizon. The memory of Torcello was so recent that I could not but be struck by the identity of the scene. The same motions, same accent, same voluble emphasis. The session was near its end. I was about to pass on, when the man, after a moment's silent scrutiny, drew forth an opera glass through which perhaps, in her day, Malibran was seen at the Scala; he signified by a gesture that he had a supplementary communication to make. All Cook's flock drew near, grave, anxious, open mouthed. Oh, surprise! Like the man of Torcello, the Milanese had caught sight of something not usually to be seen. With an authoritative gesture he called upon the elements to deliver up their mystery, and extending a finger with infallible accuracy toward a point known only to himself, cast upon the wind a name the sonorous vibrations of which spread through space. Was it an illusion? It seemed to me that the name was Giambolo.

Still Giambolo! Giambolo, visible from all heights. And the same scene was enacted as on the lagoon at Venice.

The magical glass passed from hand to hand; exclamations of joy and surprise followed one another. Everybody wished to see and saw Giambolo. They exchanged their impressions.

"Did you see the little puff of vapour?"

"Something white."

"Yes—blue."

"No—gray."

"That is it! You have seen it!"

And there was inexpressible delight. Only a few silent individuals showed by their dejected attitude the humiliation they felt at not being sure of what they had seen, or whether they had seen it. But no one took any notice of this in the tumult of commentary.

I looked at the happy group. Laughing faces, bright eyes, all the weariness of travel wiped out. Some of the women grew quiet, the more consciously to taste their joy. The men, more communicative, exchanged opinions. They had seen Giambolo, and could not get over the wonder of it.

They had not come to Italy in vain. Which opinion was shared by the excellent Lombardy guide, weighing in his palm the money accruing to him from the sight of Giambolo.

A week had passed without any notable event

other than meeting everywhere those pilgrim bands who spoil all pleasure in beautiful things by the obsession of their ready-made admirations. From the outer rotunda of the convent in Assisi I was letting my gaze wander over the plain of Umbria, all the world in sight being an expanse of billowing greenness. As if through a trap door a man sprang up at my side, then two, then ten, then what seemed a thousand, for the platform on which I had a moment before been walking alone under the sky was turned into a clamorous ant hill.

Voices on all sides exclaimed: "Here it is! Here is the place from which we can see. Over there, there, the towers of Perugia. And the railway!"

"What! The railway that brought us?"

"Yes, really!"

"How strange!"

"Can you tell me, sir," said a fat man, puffing, "the name of yonder village?"

"No, sir."

"Ah, and that other one?"

"No, sir."

There was a cry. Everyone rushed in the direction whence it came. I feared that someone had fallen over the parapet. Not at all, it was the call of the cicerone who had something to impart. As soon as he had obtained silence:

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began in ringing tones, "the day is exceptionally favourable to show

you, far away, beyond Perugia, something which few travellers have had the good fortune to see from here."

The greasy opera glass came into sight, wrapped in a red handkerchief together with cigarettes and divers odds and ends. The entire audience was aquiver with suspense, keen to the point of anguish.

"You shall now see," he cried.

I fled. But I had finally begun to see the philosophy of the phenomenon. In a word, Giambolo was a reality, since it was the thing that all these people came in search of. What exactly was it? There was no advantage in knowing, since, if Giambolo were within reach, all joy in it would be lost. Giambolo stands for that which cannot be grasped. Giambolo stands for the beyond—it is the door leading from the known to the Infinite.

We leave our country, our home and friends, all to whom we give the best of ourselves, all for whom we spend ourselves, and we go to foreign lands in quest of that fascinating Giambolo which we do not find at home, where strangers sometimes come in search of it. We wear ourselves out in the quest. When we reach home again, we claim to have seen it. Sometimes we are not sure of having done so. A monument, a statue, a picture is too close. We can always, taking the word of fame, make believe to discover what we in reality do not. But if we succeed in deceiving others, it is harder in good faith

to delude ourselves. Whereas, from a height, through the blurred glass of faith, the little white light, beyond the edge of the visible world, by which we are enabled sincerely to see what we do not see brings us the surest realization of human hope.

And, kind readers, if any one of you ever has any doubts, even though you sit in your armchair at home, follow the advice of the guide on the Venetian lagoon: "Half close your eyes——" and you will see Giambolo.

THE END



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